

A Diary Of Love

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A
Diary
Of Love

By Maude Hutchins

GEORGIANA

DIAGRAMMATICS

(WITH MORTIMER ADLER)

LOVE IS A PIE

In Preparation

MY HERO

EXORDIUM

MY DIARY is false; in the sense that it is *ex post facto*. At an age when I should be the president of the garden club or running for Congress I dream of the diary I did not keep, out of inertia I did not attend to. And so the garden I neglected an hour a day grew of itself into a landscape which like a backdrop introduces me now as a lonely figure on a stage which has been called all the world, and everyone is watching me and waiting for something to happen. The orchestra is plaintively tuning up and a few late ones are coming down the aisles preceded by pert usherettes looking over their heads for still later customers. I do not know my lines, even my cue, for neither has been written. I am the playwright and I do not know what will happen.

PART ONE

THIS MORNING I helped with the produce. I picked raspberries, or rather I pulled raspberries. It is Indian Summer and a foggy, warm mist soothes the left over garden tempting it to grow a little longer but not providing the energy, the challenge of cooler, or even hotter, flightier weather. The raspberries come off easily, they are so ripe, so willing but without ardor. I lift a handful to my mouth, tilt up my chin, and too lazy to chew, too languorous and affectionate to demolish or bite, I press them to the roof of my mouth with my tongue and the juice, the same temperature, I guess, as the inside of my mouth, I do not feel any more than I do the raspberries themselves; of equal thrust, I suppose, equal density, nonresistant, therefore; they do not seem to be there. It is like the smell of perfume in my mouth. I want more of this but not too fast, a little variety: I pull ten more, lovely and plum colored, away from the small penis-like excrescence of each and the naked immodesty of the little scene settles in my brain. Already, thinking ahead about something else, I carry out

my sensuous plan of a moment ago, losing a little of the pleasure. I trundle the ten in my tongue, curving it up at the edges, and then I slowly raise the lovely load to the vault, the red vault, and crush them softly, all of us the same color, the same, even the fog is pink . . . it is a kind of sweet disintegration, a lack of tension; no bones. But what about this curious identification with genitalia? I feel the pressure of blood (is it the juice of the raspberries?) enter up into my throat, my ears; the soft tenuous fog, the smoky, loving mist outlines gently the uncovered parts of my body with a mild pressure, making me whole again; and I want to undress and feel how sweet it would be all over; compassionately molded, how I would fit into this pink fog! Perhaps I would keep forever, tenderly nourished and preserved. But the histology of the raspberries lies questioningly in my mind; I reach out, and with my thumb and two fingers I press the warm berry, sensing inside it something more energetic, less passive; do my finger-tips feel, or are they producing, a minute vibration, a secret rhythm? Does the berry swell ever so little I pull it toward me and there is a decided resistance. It does not want to leave! I let it go back. I pull it away, and I have exposed the tiny white member. Suddenly cruel, I tear her away from him and there is blood on my hand. I am tense and I start guiltily as Russe, the hound, leaps from the foliage upon a grasshopper; his tongue is hanging out of his mouth almost to his knees and the grasshopper goes into a spin from fatigue at the top of his leap and lands between the paws of Russe who is too tired and stretches out, trying to gulp down his swollen tongue without success. How hot it is. St. Luke's Summer; just when we all begin to make sense again and do our homework and put an extra blanket on the bed and

try to be good and maybe accomplish something, summer puts on a fifth act, "You're gonna miss me when I'm gone."

I stumble into the kitchen with my quota of berries, and Frieda; the pale slim Swede, is at the sink fixing the late crop of very young carrots for supper. The back of her pink uniform is wet and her straight blond hair is sticking to her forehead. She is pretty in a provoking way but limp and sad. I know her story: she did not marry for love; she married for children, specifically a son; more maternal than passionate she counted the days. For ten years she crossed them off on calendar after calendar. Nothing. Then he left his pale provokingly pretty Frieda, humiliated by her pleading eyes, I suspect, as if all she asked was a drink of water; why, in Heaven's name, could he not quench her consuming thirst? The kitchen sounded full of crickets as I came in and I carelessly let in a few of those late November flies that bite like fury.

"Princess, your raspberries, slightly wormy," I said.

She smiled at me absently and I stood watching her handle the anemic baby carrots. She was preparing them properly: you never scrape young carrots; you boil them as they are and then you plunge them in cool water like beets; it is easy and pleasant to remove the skin. It is thin as a membrane and as colorless and the carrot emerges smooth and yellow and slippery. I saw her tenderly cupping the young carrots in her palms and she was so expert that they leapt out of their skins into the dish where a pat of butter lay. A few she gently massaged. We were both silently watching the manipulation of the numerous little roots when she said quietly "Come, it won't hurt. There, dear one, it didn't, did it." Her soft fingers were so loving; what was she dreaming of? What maternal solicitude was

this, her hands in the sink? She was finished and dried her wrists. "In the old country," she said, "they don't circumcise the little boys."

Weak and pink from my own fantasy in the garden I easily recognized the content of her trance and its phallic significance. "Those carrots are to Frieda," I thought, "what blocks are to a mathematician." I did not say anything as there seemed to be nothing to say and, besides, I felt that she had not meant for me to follow the chronology of her thoughts. I was too astute from my recent experience for anybody's good. I went upstairs the back way to take a cool bath and in the dim hall stumbled over Russe who was cowering in the dark. I leaned over and patted him. "Russe, I'm sorry." He was shuddering; his jaws were rigid. Good Lord, a thunderstorm in November; there was no sense in trying to comfort Russe. "Isn't nature wonderful," I said sarcastically as I ran the tub.



I went to see Dominick because about eleven o'clock in the morning I like grapes. It is cooler; the wind is in the North but the ground is still warm, the sun hot but less direct; it has an offside brilliance that lights up only portions of the earth like a pie; I feel that if I stepped back aways I would be in the dark. There was a blow last night at the change of the wind and the yellow leaves and the tomato-red ones from the maples and sugar maples are two inches thick. They are still drifting in the air and the sound in the trees now, since yesterday, is brittle and harsh, no longer in half-tone like gossip, plaintive, like supernatural music. Dominick lives in one of our houses about five minutes' lazy walking

through the leaves that are dry as potato chips on top and damp on the ground; they smell "dark." Dominick has started his mid-morning gluttony without waiting for me. His back is to me and he is rhythmically eating his way along the exuberant vines, tapping his foot as if it were atune.

"Where's the fire?"

Dominick turns around, sharp, eager, spitting out a mouthful of purple skins, "Fire?" and he is on his way.

"No, no, Dominick, no fire."

"You said fire."

"It was a figure of speech; move over, where may I begin?"

Dominick's mouth is already full, he points and I take my stand far enough away to avoid the skins he spits out in an arc so that he is soon surrounded by them; now and then a swallow swoops down and by, carrying one off, followed by more swallows doing exactly the same; it is very pretty even if Dominick is an odd St. Francis. I don't eat my grapes as Dominick does: I choose a bunch, then I turn away from the vine, looking out and beyond, at the trees, the sky, the barns and the outhouses, the hay mounds and the stacks of yellow corn, the slanting light of the sun. I pluck out one grape at a time and gently, suavissima, force the grape out of its skin into my mouth, suck the sweetest part from the skin at last and toss it away. I break the pattern of Dominick's swallow ballet as one or two at slower tempo swoop for mine; with divided tails they look like notes. But I am as greedy as Dominick; I may even out-eat him because he is conditioned to nausea if he eats over a bushel; his Mother told my Aunt the grapes come up faster even than they went down and as good as new.

"Why I could have made jelly!" said Mrs. Vanderdonck, shocking my Aunt and giving high satisfaction to her husband who likes to show her off.

Mr. Vanderdonck is a New York architect, handsome, almost a dandy; my Aunt says he spends more time running the Beaux Arts Ball than designing houses. He has a pointed, pinkish-red beard, blue eyes, and wears incredibly thick tweeds like horse blankets. He wears them all the time, Summer and Winter, Spring and Fall, and he won't dress for dinner. Mrs. Vanderdonck appears to think he is wonderful; calls him a flirt. She has high, almost apoplectic coloring; her eyes are a warm dense brown, her hair graying, her figure supple but round in places. I feel a strong sex drive; I believe she is willing and ardent and he clever at the whole thing. I don't know what I mean but I almost smell them; in a small room it stifles me and my brain makes analogies: a dairy or a racing stable, even a kennel, a gamy flavour, too. They neither of them attract me, understand, it is between them. Dominick is the result of this marriage, the fruit of this union but I don't think it is a case of planned parenthood and I pick it up round and about from kitchen to drawing room and in the barns that Mrs. Vanderdonck has a lot of stepchildren she has never been introduced to. She probably knows it and is proud of him, the old rake. They love Dominick as if he were a dolphin or a tadpole, with an irresponsible kind of affection. They just observe him, encourage him, and the badder he is the harder they laugh; the worse he behaves the more successful they think they are as breeders and educators, it appears. Dominick is interesting: he is carnal, lascivious, sensual, saucy, but he is, also, in a kind of opposition to these characteristics without canceling them: bookish,

scholarly, almost erudite, indolent, innocent. The whole family is as innocent as if civilization had never been devised. They eat when they are hungry and sleep when they are sleepy; they yell rather than telephone to a neighbor. Dominick will sit in a puddle in a new suit and play, and go to the bathroom any place, inside or out. He has no modesty whatever, but he calls the hired-man the "hirsute hireling" and means it; he says "the mare is impervious to the stallion," "the cook should have no franchise, lacking any criterion."

"I want to go to the pond," Dominick says, stepping over the grape skins, and as I go along, thinking of the limpid, pale blue water I hope he does not intend to pollute it. He pushes out his stomach and says sweetly, "ovicular." As we near the pond, the willow leaves skittering along its surface, Dominick senses excitement and I catch it. There is a group at the water's edge kneeling and standing, an empty canoe floats near by, someone is running and as we come up the cook of another of the tenants says, "Go away." Gilbert, one of my sister's beaux, is bending over a completely limp boy on the ground. The boy is on his back, his head thrown back awkwardly as if he had been dumped there; he is as pale blue as the pond and his face is swollen; his hands, too, hovering over the grass are plump and arched a little as if he were playing the piano. (Is he a genius?) Fear is in the air.

"His tongue is in his throat, he will choke!" someone says, "get a safety pin!" and that is why someone is running. No one thinks to turn him over, at least no one does.

"Why a safety pin?" I think, and then I know: they are going to pin his tongue up, but to what? Oh, horror! My skin tingles all over and my heart beats hard and slow. The swollen boy and his swollen tongue; the tall man attempts to

lift it out with his fingers but it slips away, back down his throat. The pin. I look away, it is too much; there is a sweet taste in my mouth. Suddenly I feel Dominick on my side, pressing his legs against me, straddling my thigh; with his eyes on the drowned boy he is absently, rhythmically embracing me. He looks like a saint, his mouth slightly open and a hesitant radiance about him "He's crazy," I say to myself.

"Get off me," I whisper frantically, "you little fool, stop it."

We are on the edge of a group more attracted by the magnet of death, than to the little scene we make; see that wet and soggy boy who isn't breathing any more but who keeps on swelling, and, Dominick, I think, as I run home, through no fault of his own, involuntarily attempted to give birth to a new boy to take the place of the one drowned. And who could blame him in that passionate atmosphere with that strange emotional rhythm of the heart. I felt a sickening excitement, too, followed by weak knees as I stumbled home for a glass of ginger ale. "Russe, Russe, hello Russe."



Schooldays: I don't go far to school, just upstairs to the attic. My Grandfather had a floor laid over the lath and plaster and beams that I remember as a child, where I played exciting games with my dolls, rescuing them in advance from the dangers I anticipated, but we never fell through as we had been warned we would. There is a blackboard the length of the room and a handmade table and a long bench, a decent carpet on the new flooring and that's all. Except of course, Miss Heminway. Miss Heminway walks three miles

from the village to instruct, or perhaps I should say, admonish us. She takes a cup of tea and some biscuits and a few nuts for lunch and walks back in the afternoon. She is, as a result, thin and nervous, pale, but not with the lovely pallor of the unproductive Frieda; this is a sterile pallor, too, but it comes from the outside, definitely unhealthy; inside she is certainly dark, as dark spots on her cheeks and hands prove; the pigment has seeped through, but without the benefit of circulation it just stays in one place, I guess. She has a cough, too; so has Frieda, but again how different. Hers is a nervous little hacking sound, especially when she is unprepared and she is always unprepared, I mean for everything; she's scared, coughs for time. "Oh give me Time." While Frieda, unblessed, has a croupy cough like Camille. As pupils, Miss Heminway has Dominick, Genie the gardener's daughter and me; my Sister goes to boarding school. This morning as we crept up the narrow back-ladder stair I felt depressed; Summer is over, with my mind and soul not yet ready for application; I want to loaf and dream a little longer. I hate school. At least whatever this funny, archaic, daily performance in the almost unlighted attic can be called. How do I know what school is.

"Good morning, Noel," I am greeted as I glimpse Miss Heminway's "sensible" shoes and six inches of cotton leg, and she sees my head and shoulders emerge. Right behind me, looking up my skirt and breathing on my ankles that I have dared to leave bare, comes Dominick, with pomade (his father's whisker-controller) on his hair, a new suit and a necktie and sneakers, dirty. Genie is last, I won't describe her now. Good morning, Master Dominick. [His mother insists he be addressed like a little gentleman; the Vanderdoncks aren't really country people and don't approve of

our being called by our first names by everyone, the tradespeople, the help, the village children. Sophisticated town people just plain don't understand what country-bred gentlefolk accept without question.]

"Good morning, *Eugenie*." Miss Heminway, very sensitive, very poor, considers herself as good as any of the gentlefolk who shame her by paying her for her talents, and her calling Genie, the gardener's daughter, *Eugenie*, pronouncing it in the French at that (Genie is Bohemian) has something pusillanimous about it, a sinister rebuke; *Master Dominick*? All right! *Eugenie*. My Grandfather pays for Genie's tutoring but it stabs something snobbish and middle class in poor Miss Heminway to be teaching the little Bohemian and taking money for it. Genie loves "*Eugenie*" and blushes shyly with pleasure; even when Dominick hollers at her outside, "Hi Empress, your pants are coming down," she doesn't mind a bit.

"Good morning Miss Heminway."

"Good morning Miss Heminway."

"Good morning Miss Heminway, ma'am."

As we mount the bench exactly as if it were a horse (how else?) we raise our eyes to see what wise saying or biblical message our tutor has written on the blackboard: *Aut vincere aut mori*. Who but Dominick knows the answer? Miss Heminway is definitely our intellectual superior; in Latin and in French and from the Scripture she draws forever on an inspired language, compensating for her own lack of aggressiveness; a kind of secret "I told you so" symptomatic of her inner frustration; an esoteric queenship, instead of spanking our backsides, including my Grandfather's and Mr. (architect) Vanderdonck's and Mrs. (woman) Vanderdonck's. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall*

inherit the earth and *Monumentum aere perennius* and *O tempora! O mores!* Some for Dominick and some for me and some even for little *Eugenie*, the tiny Empress of Bohemia. And her cryptic message the day Mrs. Vanderdonck visited: *Principia, non homines*. On the first of April last year Dominick had the audacity to write on the board in beautiful round characters, *Poisson d'Avril* and before our quarterly examination *Pons asinorum*; but the day he broke in and anticipated her with, "Did you know that a hinny was the offspring of a horse and a she-ass? And a hip, the fruit of a dog rose?" his poetic anarchy seemed to me genius, although it only brought forth from Miss Hemingway after a tight, hard series of coughs the ridiculous colloquialism, "Swallowed the dictionary, Master Dominick?"

It is hot in the attic; it will take two weeks for the cool air to penetrate this gabled torture chamber. Miss Hemingway is reading Macauley's *History of England*: our education is good but not applicable. As she reads, "The chief direction of affairs was now entrusted to Sir Thomas Osborn, a Yorkshire baronet, who had, in the House of Commons, shown eminent talents for business and debate . . . With the help of the old cavalier interest, of the nobles, of the country gentlemen, of the clergy, and of the Universities, it might, he conceived, be possible to make Charles, not indeed . . .," I recall the St. Martin's drowning, as if it were a French engraving framed by the small attic window, and I feel again the seductive anaesthesia of death, fear, and desire. I am in the hands of a powerful negation, while I sit here facing a blackboard that does not, cannot, hold my attention; it is a prestidigitation, a *passe passe*, designed to keep us children from knowing, but from

knowing what? And who will teach us the answers? "Any questions?" said Miss Heminway shutting the book and peering under the bench for her rubbers. Evidently not. At least none that can be answered.



So this is education; and Miss Heminway is my mentor. That frigid, feeble, exasperated hermaphrodite is my counselor; and my only support for the present is *The History of England*. Is this my equipment for life? I don't feel good.



I am still cross and uneasy. Dominick, on one of his secret missions to the schoolroom found that our governess had censored *The History of England*. He took the trouble to copy a passage she had skipped to prove it to me: "Charles, while a wanderer on the Continent, had fallen in at the Hague with Lucy Waters, a Welsh girl of great beauty, but of weak understanding and desolate manners. She became his mistress, and presented him with a son. A suspicious lover might have had his doubts; for the lady had several admirers, and was not supposed to be cruel to any. Charles, however, readily took her word . . ." Dominick says the book is extensively blue-penciled: one sentence which read, "though a libertine, he won the hearts of the Puritans," now simply reads "he won the hearts of the Puritans." And by crossing out "scarcely," the statement ". . . strict conjugal fidelity was to be expected from one who . . ." remains. I wonder if all history has not been similarly censored into a kind of bed-time story so that we may sleep without dreaming; how frightened we

might be at annals otherwise. Who organized this conspiracy? Is it an exclusive scheme, a kind of contraceptive? Shall I tell my Grandfather about Miss Heminway?



I have calmed down a little; I did not want to be a tattletale. Grandfather thinks we are very fortunate to have Heminway as a governess and her brother, besides, is his pupil. He comes to Grandfather twice a week for music. The old gentleman, an amateur with perfect pitch, expert, has taken Brady on and hopes for him the musical success he was himself deprived of (because of his station in a New England community); the sweetness he had to forego he dreams of now for a stripling whose only handicap is lack of character. He (the stripling) nevertheless has a charm, a fervent youngness about him that I am sure his sister never had, even in the cradle. The old man and the young one take turns accompanying each other, one on the flute, one on the piano; the boy's blond hair is almost as white as the old man's and I have seen their heads bent over very dizzy scores. One taps a finger, one taps his foot, or both together they say, "Oh this is the way it goes."

The boy's voice is plaintive and sweet, heartbreaking, and my Grandfather's eyes fill with tears. I saw the boy standing between my Grandfather's knees, my Grandfather's small slim hands caressing his hips while the boy sang an aria almost too difficult for the flute; and then with the boy's head on his knee the old man lifted the lovely silver flute and answered him. What a strange love! How penetrating. Yesterday evening such a strange and heart-rending duet filled the study that everyone within hearing distance must have lifted his head and listened; Russe trembled, and I

saw a yellow Chinese vase vibrate on its lacquered stand; the ends of my fingers hurt. Frieda came through the pantry door noiselessly and stood with her hands pressed against her aproned thighs; she stared at the boy, her whole body expressing a fanatical yearning, and then she looked at my Grandfather with a terrible jealousy. Neither saw her.

My Aunt came to the landing on the stairs and interrupted: "Father, Leda Vanderdonck just called. I thought you would like to know: the stork has finally come to the Brewsters' house."

I am inspired with anger, the stork for gosh sakes! There it is again! That degrading censorship! And the motif is shattered, the love song is ended, the young man hangs on to my Grandfather's hand and kisses it and the old man, trembling, says, "Goodnight, boy, auf Wiedersehen." And instead of a tormenting, perverse and pretty duet, tender and passionate, all that is left is a slightly unhealthy scene, sentimental, too. Not very nice; it is even unpleasant.



Nothing worth writing about. No action, only presentiment is in the air. Something's the matter with Frieda; something's the matter with Mrs. Vanderdonck, Mr. Vanderdonck, my Aunt, my Grandfather, my Sister. Dominick is the same as ever; I am, too, I think, except that a kind of nibbling curiosity wakes me up in the morning, a kind of continued story with a hidden meaning. I trot around with a book always in my hand so that Mr. Vanderdonck calls me Bas Bleu but it's just to keep people from asking, "a penny for your thoughts?" when they come upon me in a partial coma from that Whatness. There isn't any content to the Whatness. Could it be my awakening intelligence?

(Sarcasm.) No, it isn't my brain; it's a sensuous seeking, maybe the little pigs up in the meadow feel that way about truffles; even the angleworms, stretching and yawning, tenuous, excite me a little. The stallion down in his big box stall wants to eat me. Russe is leaning way out the window, perilously balanced on the arm of my rocking chair, breathing in all the smells rapturously; is his brain trying to identify them, I wonder. No, he quivers with promiscuous pleasure, but gives a little yip-yip at something very special, nevertheless; he's just a dog. And me, I, Noel, I have a pedigree, too. I sense all around me (and the "smell" of the Vanderdoncks is in my nostrils) . . . love . . .

It is the presentiment of love! Is that all? I mean is that all there is to love? Well, it's quite a lot; I am hardly introduced and it fills my whole day, whatever it is. I am waiting, and while I wait, I feel myself tenderly embraced by a premonition, prelusory warning, an apprehension, perhaps, like Russe's trembling before a thunderstorm. When the skies are still blue Russe stiffens and then shakes all over, he shuts his teeth and it is a prescience, a foreknowledge especially for him. But he can do nothing about his clairvoyance and he does not know that the preliminary sensations are pleasant, I mean, it is sweet; and love itself?

I am willing to wait, especially when I think with trepidation of the time when, unlike Russe, I must distinguish and eliminate; I don't mean among my possible suitors; I mean among my sensations: I mean, to try to bring into focus a thing, a symbol, something to help me understand what it I am after. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* and then an Intelligence took hold and out of matter the Intelligence made Form and the world, at least our world, the earth, became a symbol [creating a problem,

by the way, *The Problem*: With abstraction, itself, taken away from man, how can he think? Intuition disappears when the mind is cluttered up with symbols; why, he cannot even speak or make himself understood; in the manner of a mathematician the lover says, "shall we be one?"] a circular symbol, dominated and obedient, isolated in space with its little moon, and off there to the left Saturn makes an even prettier emblem with his double rings.

But the inevitable symbol of love can hardly be called a choice or an act of intelligence on my part and I resent, I am indignant, that I should be expected to carry a phallic symbol around on a velvet cushion. Isn't there something else, less obvious, than this gothic token? No wonder crazy people think they are teapots. Let's forget it. In the meantime I find it everywhere: in the St. Martin's drowning, in Frieda and her carrots; I feel it in the peculiar relationship of the old man and the young one, even the instruments they use seem to be tools of love, and doesn't the boy carry the precious ebony and silver flute on a cushion, wrapped in a silk handkerchief, so tenderly up to my Grandfather's room? And doesn't Henry Vanderdonck remind me of the
• stallion?



There is a tension inside the house, and out, and I feel it; nothing is exempt, not even the animals: sensitive, the horses and the dogs react to the humans who pull at their mouths and their leashes. The hens have become cannibals and devour their young still in the shell, the ducks interrupt their usual parade across the lawn in the evening by sudden hectic plunges as if an invisible enemy instigated it, and the guinea hens in the morning are more hysterical than

ever; the swallows are definitely moving out. And I, without portfolio, as it were, in secret, I watch and observe and peek through keyholes, you might say, to solve, being curious and alert, a problem. And because I understand there must be a premise, what else could the premise be but my preoccupation: love. My Grandfather forgot, which is strange in itself, Brady's lesson. I saw him go off with his rod and reel to one of the ponds; Aunt is out with the stallion, riding through the woods. My Aunt who is timid, inhibited, amazes the neighbors and the village folk, and us, by her horsemanship, her lack of fear on a horse. Sun Beau, son of Dewey McKinney out of Favonia is 17 hands; he is too proud and wicked to be either shod or bitted in the ordinary way. Aunt rides him with the strap of the bridle over the top of his soft and quivering nostrils as he will not allow the bit to be put in his mouth; and his hind heels are shoeless; in the Spring, on the soft ground, it is as if a two-legged beast had passed. A woman with, I think, no appeal, rides Sun Beau as if she were a loving mistress, astride him she lovingly guides him with the shifting of slight weight, with her soft thighs against his flanks she directs him; her hands seem to caress his nose, and his flaring nostrils quiver and weep as no longer demonstrative or fearful of paper bags and little boys, he fears, now, only for her, lest he hurt her, his sweetheart. Tense, he chooses his path, himself, tenderly letting her believe she is guiding him, tossing his head; with trembling ears and specific shivers he feverishly carries her along, bringing her home at last, safe into the stable, and from her hands takes a lump of sugar, breathing hard, his fierce aspect turned to a slobbering sentimentality.

This daily liaison has a mythological quality and I am sure

Sun Beau has no earthly rivals. As soon as my Aunt dismounts she becomes at once self-conscious and plain, very plain, with the exception of her big eyes, the color of gun metal which like Sun Beau's leave no room for whites. Free and almost pagan, desirable, astride the animal, now she looks around her like a silly old maid; ashamed of her masculine attire; with foolish female steps and feminine wiggles she can't get up to her room quickly enough to undress, bathe, and put on something mid-Victorian with a high boned collar; the smell of Sun Beau out of Favonia is scrubbed away and a sickly lavender perfume emanates from her making Mr. Vanderdonck wrinkle up his nose at me in disgust. I have noticed how a synthetic smell can change the whole tenor of one's thoughts, a kind of overt laconic period to reverie. I understand bees hate it, too. They will sting you in a fury, doused in eau-de-cologne. Soap and sterility.

Well, Dominick and his passionate parents had gone into town for the day in their stinking old Pierce and I was alone, except, I thought, for Frieda. I, too, forgot about Brady's appointment and went off vaguely to look for her; maybe she would tell me again about how she lay in her blond husband's arms, and with benefit of clergy, blessed, and with the rice, symbol of fertility, still in her hair, sought conception. With her man's mouth cutting off her breath, how she held it in anticipation; passionately receptive, how she thought she felt, as reality slipped away, as the corners of the room came together, as the blood throbbed in her ears, actual, spontaneous maternity and how she' . . .

But Frieda wasn't in her room or in the kitchen or in the back of the house. Frieda never took walks: nature had failed her and could not comfort or tease her into forgetting



her connubial humiliation with colored leaves and bright wheat. All or nothing was Frieda. The matrix in which nothing has formed is still a cavity; Frieda . . . but where was Frieda? "Frieda!" I called into the empty house, but all I heard was a lot of clocks ticking, especially Frieda's big alarm clock by her bed. My heart began to beat harder, I could hear it, but I wasn't frightened; I didn't think in words, or imagine in images, I didn't say to myself, "suicide?" or visualize my Frieda hanging from a peg in the closet; but I felt unduly excited, anticipatory; nothing specific, a diffusion, rather, of feeling.

I don't know why I went to the old rustic playhouse where Dominick, when I was six and he was eight, persuaded me to undress, but that is where I unerringly went. I pushed open the door and there was Frieda. The back of her pink uniform was wet just as it was at the sink on a hot day; she had her back to me just as she had then and her hands were in front of her just as then; and Brady's beautiful young face had a stricken look as he faced her; his eyes were closed so tightly he did not see me at all. They were the same height and they were clasped and yet not clasped together. Brady's hands gripped her slight, strong shoulders and she was speaking soothingly, but with a deep undertone of compassion, in a thrilling contralto like someone singing, and she was saying, "It will not hurt, it does not hurt, sweet little love, there, my darling, isn't it wonderful? It does not hurt, does it? This is the way." I stepped back in fear from this terrible loneliness, this complete unawareness of others, this loss of orientation that love gave them, this almost bravado, this fearless temerity of lovers.

It was the first time I had witnessed the act of love. The variety that Frieda gave it, guiding him as she did with her

hands, initiating him, the stripling, into a secret microcosm did not detract from the perfect mystical beauty of the whole scene and at the same time it gave me a terrific impulse for action. I felt desire. All the diffuse sensations I had had became one specific pain, as if a powerful astringent had been poured over my body. All the little objects in my fantasies cleared out, too, for the moment, at least, and left me only one symbol that I recognized and I scampered away from my loss of innocence as if the stallion himself, were after me.

And he was! As I neared the main driveway to the house that led around to the stables I saw him; Sun Beau was loose! He was nibbling the still green, short, sweet grass but not in the relaxed attitude of a less fabulous horse. He seemed to be balanced on his toes, his fine neck still arched, and there were red bows on his braided hair. He heard me as I stopped in my tracks, terror in my heart. I had been running toward him and I must turn and run in the opposite direction. (The words of the groom to my Grandfather went through my mind, "He is stupid and vicious, he will kill, Sir.") I did not dare turn my back on him. "I will stand still," I said to myself. "I will face him and he won't move." He had lifted his beautiful head and without his bridle, minus his martingale, even in that moment of terror, I was filled with admiration for him; he looked like something out of the Parthenon. He moved his curving neck easily from side to side and then saw me, directly in front of him; he tossed his head once, arrogantly, showing the whites of his eyes as he kept his far-sighted glance on me and then, lifting his feet carefully as if he were on a narrow bridge, came toward me. I forgot everything I had been told or knew and, pivoting, I raced across the driveway

and into a sort of lean-to with windows and no front where the workmen on the place kept their tools. But without having to extend himself he was right behind me. The lean-to must have been built to his measurements he stepped inside so easily, filling the entire space, cutting off the light; silhouetted, he was heroic. I don't know how I did it at all but I vaulted over the window-sill and with my feet scarcely touching the ground beat it for home, losing a shoe. The stallion had got himself in all right, but by the time he had got himself out (backwards) I was safe in my own room with the door locked, and as I watched a red hot sun go down early in the mauve November sky I said, "It has been a reign of terror."



"You look sallow," said my Aunt peevishly. *Omnia vincit amor* wrote Miss Hemingway on the blackboard, at a loss for an argument. And, *Sauve qui peut*. I answered on my forehead in indelible blood, yes blood.



There is a light in Frieda's eye matched by one in Brady's. My Grandfather's blue ones have enlarged pupils as if the lamp had been moved away and he were going blind, and mine, when I looked in the mirror this morning, looked like last year's varnish or, maybe, like stagnant pools with one goldfish in each that only sporadically, feebly, catches the light.



"A penny for your thoughts," that burdensome refrain. It always interrupts, it is extremely irritating, it even causes

shock, a tiny shock but shock, nevertheless; why not, "Five cents for your feelings," that could be answered in gestures? The translation of feelings into words is so crude, so unsatisfying: I am a looker-on, a lunatic fringe . . . I am waiting for love. It is all around, disguised it is true as this and that, but I feel it and I too love. But what? Not *what*, but *whom*! After seeing Frieda and Brady it came to me that I must love some *one*. I have been loving something, not someone. This love without content no longer anaesthetizes me. From raspberries (soft roses) to Frieda and Brady was quite a leap. My education seems elementary, very, to me. (Elemental?) Where is my love? And who?



Last night the Vanderdoncks came to dinner and we had a bottle of Montrachet. "*Vive la bagatelle*," he said and Mrs. Vanderdonck said, admiringly, "He ought to be put out at stud."

My Aunt looked very pained and Mr. Vanderdonck pinched my leg hard and said, "Orange-juice-eyes is in love."

"It's lust," said that infamous Dominick, digging holes in his melon, and they laughed at him fit to kill. After dinner Mr. Vanderdonck cleaned and greased his Purdy shotgun and talked about hunting, about mallards and teal and whistlers and scaup (the duck season is open) and when he left he kissed me on the mouth before I could turn my cheek and said, still in a hunting mood, "Goodnight, little timberdoodle." (Woodcock.) Timberdoodle!

As we stood in the open door after they had gone the light from inside shone on a slight figure crossing the driveway.

"Brady," said my Grandfather, "I know you left your score, come in and let us try that piece again, come in, boy."

"No Sir, Mr. James, I can't . . . I just . . ."

I knew at once that he was either coming to, or leaving, Frieda, and got caught. His last lessons had gone badly and my Grandfather was suffering. Brady was different, sometimes cross, almost rude to the old man and I watched them, now, looking at each other, a definite struggle going on between them as if they were tied together with twine, so that each move hurt each, but Brady was cruel and stepped back suddenly, "I can't, it's late," and disappeared out of the light.

My Grandfather caught his breath; a sob; I was frightened at so much emotion in such a little man and I felt terribly angry at the crudeness of Brady's getaway. Dominick's word "lust" came to me. Was this a skirmish between love and lust? But what had it been between the old gentleman and the stripling, something else? And I imagined love as a pie, a slice for each, chacun a son gout.

"I think I'll just try that score," said my Grandfather, standing forlornly in the big hall.

"I can't sleep," I said and started for the pantry.

"How do you know you can't sleep if you haven't tried," said my Aunt on the stairs.

I went out to Frieda's room off the kitchen and gently pushed in the door. She was standing at the window in the dark.

"Frieda."

"Miss."

"Don't call me Miss."

I sat on her narrow bed, the kind of bed that servants inherit.

"Noel."

"Goodnight, Frieda."

I couldn't stand it and went off back to my room. I was shivering like Sun Beau, in spots. I took the thermometer out of its case and shook it down, I was so bored; ennui. I pushed the thermometer into my mouth, lifting my tongue, and I thought it reminded me of something; I took it out and slipped it in again, closing my eyes. (Orange-juice-eyes.) For no reason I knew of I said out loud, "Kiss me," and then I took the thing out of my mouth and viciously threw it across the room. That again! Objects! Downstairs I heard the sweet, painful sound of a flute rising and falling; the high notes like the stripling's soprano, the low as if it were the ocean, persistent, urgent, the bass repeating over and over again the theme (what is the theme?), occasionally emerging into the treble (Passacaglia?). I heard my Grandfather bolt the doors and come upstairs to bed. I heard Sun Beau stomping in his stall and, wrapped in a yellow comforter, I finally stopped shaking and went to sleep, no wiser. Timberdoodle.



I don't feel good.



I don't feel good.



I don't feel good.



I am supposed to take my temperature at 8 A.M., 12 Noon, and 4 P.M. I feel all right again. I mean my fatal curiosity

has returned and with it frustration and second sight. In this funny old mid-Victorian house all kinds of anachronisms are going on and I've got a box seat, but when I go behind the scenes I get involved in the drama. There ought to be a star on Frieda's off-kitchen bedroom door I think. Thursday I was trying to pick out *Solfegietto* (C Minor) on the piano; I was alone in the house, everyone off on his or her amusements and affairs, Frieda's day off, too, when the impure stripling came in, as usual without knocking. I am beginning to hate him, at least I feel deeply scornful, very contemptuous; his insolence to my Grand father is intolerable to me and he has changed like someone out of Bulfinch, as if, mythologically, some Goddess, furious at his earthly infidelity, had given him the treatment, taken away his boyish beauty. He isn't a humpback or bowlegged, he is still slim and straight, his hair very blond, his movements graceful, but his expression is sensual, Bacchic; without precision his features don't express anything beautiful any more. I saw him coming reflected in the highly polished Steinway; the sun behind him, his features blurred in the piano, he looked like a primitive angel, still.

"Hello, Noel," he said when he had reached me, and he slid onto the bench beside me.

I didn't look up, "I'm practising."

"Let me show you, like this," and I remembered Frieda's chant, "This way, it won't hurt, it doesn't hurt, does it."

He took my fingers and bending them at the knuckles placed them on the proper notes; he slid closer and I felt his soft, warm thigh like a girl's and the side of his knee. (This is it! Quick! Think!) He neatly straddled the narrow bench and arching his back pulled me with both arms

toward him, twisting me at the waist, close, and slightly under, his chest. In such a strained position I don't remember any discomfort; I felt how soft my breasts felt against him and then as he gripped me closer, bending his head, he began to chew my cheeks that were hot under his soft searching mouth. He got excited and twisted my waist too hard at last, hurting me, "Oh!"

"Turn toward me then," he whispered fiercely, "put your leg over the bench. Look, this way, like this."

No! No! I extricated myself quickly and easily from his arms, saved by the pain that had startled me out of my cozy coma, and I felt immediate disgust, a sickening repulsion for Frieda's nasty little lover . . . but for a moment hadn't I wanted . . . ? My own weakness increased my contempt for him and I felt real hatred. I wanted to get rid of him; be sick. I went upstairs and upchucked.

Then Frieda came back early; she had no contacts in the village, didn't know what to do with her day off. I went down to look at her as if studying her I might find an answer from this complicated female to the complications of love.

"I just upchucked, Princess."

"I was sick yesterday morning and this morning," she said. "It's clams."

"Clams?"

Frieda looked so pretty and special I stared at her a long time; I wanted to tell her all of it, confide in her.

"Frieda," I began, "Brady . . ." and sitting on her bed beside her I told her; I told her fast and as I spoke of details I felt, more strongly than at the time of Brady's attempted seduction, the response of my body, to his hands, his mouth. I felt the very tips of my breasts move.

Frieda, as if I had spoken of it, placed her palms on them and, breathing a little hard, slid her cheek down mine. "Baby, let him do it," she said in a low, tense voice, "let him, it won't hurt."

I felt my breast creep into her hands and the nipples were hard between her fingers. A stinging sensation radiated out from each as if one had pressed an electric bell with a finger, *zzzzt!* Frieda's bell rang, jangling my nerves; my whole body jumped.

"Your Aunt," Frieda said, looking at me with a curious, impelling, but fragile penetration. "Come back."

"Noel," said Aunt, "you are not to fraternize with the servants, it only confuses them."

So that is what it is, fraternizing? I was completely bewildered. Confused, my body is ^{one} up on me. I trail along behind it wondering what it will do next. Has it no discrimination?

Well, Sunday, as always, old Doctor Pynchon came to dinner (in the middle of the day on Sundays). He never fails to show up and we always set a place for him; how he loves to eat. Frieda waited on table; I thought she looked especially pretty and at ease, with a dreamy intensity about her; I thought about her husband; Frieda's description of his blond strength, his big chest and straight, hard legs, and covered all over with short, almost invisible hair, like a peach; the tattoos on his forearms (on the inside where they swell and are soft), tattoos of birds and women; [Leda and the swan? Or wouldn't a dock-side artist have reference to that classic?]. And Frieda's anger at him, first for not giving her a son, and second for leaving her when, who knows, the next time, maybe, she might have got up with something inside her (listen!). But Frieda's anger had begun

to wane; she had the stripling, he was hers; she held him between her legs; wasn't he her son, didn't she nurse him, his head indenting her breast, his teeth nibbling and chewing, his lips kissing and sucking; his body rocked in her rhythmic embrace; mother and son, the profoundest passion of all? It came to me! Why, of course she will loan him to me! She wants him to be happy, she is proud of, and passionately interested in, his virility; she *wants* him to seduce me: "It won't hurt, let him do it!" The mother of a son hates other women: "Seduce them, seduce them all!" Didn't she even try to prepare my body for pleasure to please *him*?

The pantry door swung shut on Frieda, catching her pink skirt; she bent down and freed herself, smiling, and Dr. Pynchon said, with his mouth full of chicken, "Since when has Frieda been pregnant?"

What! My brain that had been so active, providing me with picture after picture like colored postcards of life: liaison and diapason, slowed down, and almost stalled, it wouldn't work (I could only think, *enceinte*, the word I looked up in my first French dictionary only to find that it meant a fence). Everything for a moment was so still that the Doctor noticed it and lifted his head.

"What, what's this, *she's* old enough," and he pinched my cheek (I was thinking of Frieda's, "It's clams."). My Aunt, at the word pregnant, had half risen in her chair, her eyes up as if she were listening, had heard something, the brush of wings maybe? Not the stork again! I wanted to think and excused myself, and part way up the stairs I heard my Aunt do the same thing. But she's not as well equipped as I am (to think) I said to myself conceitedly. She'll never figure it out, she's blocked. My Aunt's virginity

puzzled me more than Frieda's unscrupulous pantomime; Frieda's behavior had significance; Aunt didn't have any behavior to figure out what she behaved from. I think Aunt really believes in the stork, and into my uninhibited, in fact, uncontrolled, imagination crept a vision in technicolor. (So that was it!) Leda and the stork! Just say stork instead of swan and you know at last where that legendary buffoonery started. All this irrelevance, [Clams! It's clams, said Frieda; I see myself on the beach at low tide with a whole bucket of soft-shell clams (steamers), big ones, you know how indecent they look, a highly obscene phallic symbol one of them makes, so who can say it wasn't clams!] this irrelevance, lasted until I got all the way up the stairs. Only then it finally reached my consciousness: but Frieda is sterile! She knows it so positively, and has for ten years; that plaint, "Maybe if he had done it once more," was only the extra humiliation of being deserted, along with the wish to blame *him* for her unproductiveness. The clam remark, as an explanation of her nausea, proved she didn't believe herself pregnant. But how precise her intuition must be for her to speak in symbols: "It's clams!", just as at the sink she had spoken of circumcision while skinning the baby carrots. 4:30 P.M. Temperature: 99.8.



I woke up in fear this morning; early: the stallion is loose! The sound of his hoofs seemed to beat in my temples; I heard myself calling "Frieda! Frieda!" and woke myself up with it. Yes, it was true; his gallop, the four-legged rhythm with two soft beats reverberating from the hard ground was unmistakable. Coward! I was wet with perspiration, and

it took great effort to get out of bed, held down, as I seemed to be, by my dreams; I wanted to close the window, hide myself. What does Sun Beau want of me? I got to the window, and outside in the sunlight I saw Frieda beating a big oriental rug that was thrown across the line, weighing it down: plutty-plut, plutty-plut, plutty-plut! I was so relieved I became elated.

"Good morning, Princess," I called, "you five-gaited mare, watch out for Sun Beau."

She looked up at me and into the sun, smiling, and it is true Frieda's body is changing; as she stands in profile, the wind draping her pink uniform, molding it against her limbs, she looks like one of Cranach's Eves or one of the lovely pregnant nymphs, with flowers in their hair, that Botticelli painted so tenderly; I feel a tenderness, too, for the little Swede, the brave, innocent Swede, no longer barren, ignited by a wraith. Take care, Frieda. I heard her cough as she came back into the kitchen: Courage, Camille!

I found Mr. Vanderdonck helping himself to breakfast off the sideboard, generously offering my Grandfather his own victuals.

"Come in, come in," he said to me, "Sausage-eyes, golden sausage," and he looked from his plate to me: "Have some."

"Mr. James, did you hear about the old girl who went to a taxidermist to have her pet monkey, who died, stuffed? 'Mounted?' said the taxidermist. 'No, only one,' said the old girl. Ha, ha, ha, ha . . . funny?"

My sensitive mood began to evaporate like the dew; Botticelli's Spring didn't last long.

"Come here," called Dominick; he was outside on the step; he had a long stick, and, bending down, he was prod-

ding a toad; he turned it over on its back, poked at its bulging gray stomach that looked quilted from the pokings, lifted it over again, allowing it to right itself clumsily: "Plop," only to repeat the whole thing; the toad's colorless, heavy eyes expressed nothing but an even kind of constant despair; Dominick's expression was the same as when he watched the drowned boy, not brutal or really cruel, but voluptuous.

"I better get out of here," I said to myself, "just in case." I remember the drowning, and Dominick's absent-minded attack.

"Isn't there anything *else*," I said out loud as I came upstairs to write the above. 12 Noon. Temperature: 98.7.



Melody, my sister, has come home for the holidays and we are temporarily relieved of Miss Heminway, and Brady, too; they have gone to Ohio to visit relatives. Well, they cancel each other, those two, the neuter Miss Heminway (minus) and the ardent Brady (plus). The music lessons have practically ceased; the old man plays alone. I heard Brady's voice in my Grandfather's study one night, the night before he quit coming altogether; it sounded high and sick like an hysterical girl's, corroded, no longer simulating the flute: "Leave me *alone*!" and then, "I will *tell*." And Miss Heminway's cryptic farewell message on our blackboard said in Christmas colors: *Ultima ratio regnat*. She's losing her grip, I guess. Melody is engaged, she says. 1 P.M. Temperature: 99.4.



I cannot bring myself to satisfy my curiosity in re: Frieda. I cannot bring myself to ask her. Frieda has gained an impervious ascendancy and with it an imperturbability, a kind of self-satisfied aloofness. And her confidence takes away the confidence of others, as if there wasn't any more, just a given amount, for the family group. I know for instance that Aunt has not approached her and certainly not given her notice; my Grandfather does not interfere in domestic crises, ever; he goes into his study and battens down the orifices, and at those times his music seems to seep out under the door like blood; he is wounded. He is so taken up with his own specific pain this time: the loss of his companion, that he does not see what else is going on; Brady's terrible disloyalty and frivolity, if he knew it all, would kill the old man. As it is, the stripling's insolence and abuse, his indifference to music and friendship, are like pins in the old man's quivering flesh, stuck at intervals along his blue veins like rivers. As on a map, in time of war, Brady is seeing to it that they make progress and toward Grandfather's heart. Perhaps in this, too, the analogy holds and there is only so much pain and he has only so much to bear; the rest will be distributed. (I think I need only wait for mine.) Melody, I am sure, because I saw her involuntary stare, noticed the change in Frieda's shape. She blushed; but Frieda, with the dignity and charm of a good hostess, whose neighbor's dog has wet the floor, said, "How *nice* to see you." She makes us all feel quite at home. My Aunt does a certain amount of twitching and complaining but cannot pass the designated line that Frieda imposes, any more than a frustrated hen (can).



Well, I asked Frieda. My heart beating hard, I said just the right thing to gain her attention, even though her cool and complete denial confused me more than ever.

"Frieda, did Brady leave you anything?"

She understood me at once. "No," she said, "of course not; I am empty."

The door opened and one of the carpenters who is building the new chicken house came in.

"Here, Miss," he said to Frieda, "are the curls, as you call them, you asked for," and he handed Frieda a bunch of new shavings.

"Oh, thanks so much," said Frieda neatly. "Take them, Noel, my hands are wet."

I held the dancing curlicue shavings for her; they were like children's curls, so fresh and clean and perfumed.

"How sweet," I said, but Frieda was silent. "Frieda, trust me, please trust me," but she only coughed.

"She is going to play with those curls," I thought, as I went back to my room. "Poor Frieda," and I remembered how, when I was very little, I had missed my mother and had sneaked to the sewing room and caressed the dress-maker's dummy; I had laid my head against the hard bosom covered with black cotton and talked to it; headless and legless, it was a speechless black torso.

Melody, who usually treats me like a kid, came out of her room and said, "Have you seen Frieda?"

"Yes."

"I think," she said, whispering, "I know." Then she told me her suspicions. "It is Mr. Vanderdonck."

Her evidence was based on Mr. Vanderdonck's libidinous character and on propinquity, I supposed, but I couldn't help laughing; Melody's circumstantial evidence seemed to me ridiculous.

"I'll tell you something, Noel, you're old enough to know a young girl's problems. I know it's Mr. Vanderdonck and I'll tell you why. Come here," she closed the door. "Last fall, the day before I left for school, I went out in the playhouse [again!] so I could be alone a little while and think; you didn't know it but Peter had asked me to be engaged to him. I'll tell you about that some other time, and I didn't know if I loved him enough to be his wife and the mother of his children [Melody!] and all that sort of thing, you know, and so I was out there and it was quite warm and nice, Indian Summer, and Mr. Vanderdonck had been having a glass of port with our Grandfather and came out past the playhouse, he saw me and said, 'Hello, Melody, pretty creature,' and I said, of course, 'Hello.' He came in; I was just sitting on the table, you know, with my feet on the bench, and he sat down and said, 'I remember when I used to hold you on my knee and now you are a beautiful young lady.' Then, Noel, he kissed me, he kissed me on the lips and before I could do anything, or say anything, he put his arms around me and kissed me again on my neck. I don't know *what* would have happened if I hadn't said, 'Oh, Mr. Vanderdonck,' and I ran out and left him. Now you see I have reason to believe that he did it; he has no sense of honor, whatever, not a bit, Noel, and you be careful, even if you are a kid, he is the very limit, and he has seduced Frieda, yes, seduced her."

I kept my story of the stripling's attempted seduction to myself but I thought of the dual evidence, all depending on which witness, except I had seen Brady and Freida, in that same playhouse where things happened, evidently; all kinds of things.

"I don't think Frieda is going to have a baby," I said, completely unprepared to back up my statement.

"Noel, don't you know *anything!*"

Well, I must really admit I don't know much; it is very confusing. I forgot to take my temperature today. Russe had a woodtick in his ear and came to me for help; I shivered with disgust as I clamped my fingernails under the swollen tick that clung like a bent thumbtack to poor Russe. To the last it quenched its desperate thirst until I finally got the bloody creature off in two pieces. Ahh! I felt sick but Russe is kissing my hands.



I met Melody's fiancé during the holidays; he is very good-looking, but Melody confides her doubts to me, if not to him; he seems very sure of her and innocent of her introspection concerning the future. They sat in Grandfather's study after Grandfather had gone to bed almost every night. He would always come out first on his way home, followed a little later by Melody (looking pink as a rose [what else is there to look as pink as?] all over, even her legs looked rosy through her stockings), who looked as if she had been caught in a lie when she saw me reading on the sofa (every time). I breathe in the love-making, that I know is going on behind the door, like a perfume, St. Martin's Mist, and I don't want to let go anymore than the tick, of Russe, and my cheeks feel pink, too, with somebody else's blood, somebody else's passion. Thief! I should blush, not my sister. The last time he came out of the study he came over to me, looked down at me for a moment, and asked, "A love story?"

"No," I lied.

He lifted me to my feet and crushed me (damn the vocabulary of that novel) to his big, very 'nice, and supple frame (*I* say, body). He lowered his head and, as I made no move, kissed me very hard in the very middle of my mouth, just a plain, hard, warm, decisive kiss, clinging for just a second and then suddenly gone. "Goodnight, Noel, and Happy New Year," and he looked very happy, himself. Well, *he's* got more than enough, I think; there won't be any stinting or rationing-out in thimble-fuls with him. How nice he is, and generous. How easy to love him, so simple, nothing to it. The night after he left for college I came down to look for the stupid novel that had slipped out of my hands when Melody's fiancé had kissed me. I had planned to have the pleasure all over again in my imagination, slowing it up to enjoy it longer. I had been waiting until the house was quiet, everyone in bed, but I heard Mr. Vanderdonck's voice as I reached the landing and standing in the dark there I saw through the banisters: Melody.

"I love you," Melody was saying in a tearful, dramatic voice, 'I love you, Mr. Vanderdonck, with all my heart and mind and soul and body.'

"Melody, be calm."

"I *do*," she repeated in a high voice, "and you don't even *look* at me, you never ever have looked at me even, you don't *speak* to me ever, you treat me as if I were a *child*." He tried to interrupt her . . . "I know I am only seventeen in *years* but I am older than that in my *mind*, I . . ."

Mr. Vanderdonck took her by the shoulders, so gently, but he shook her a little. "Melody, listen to me; I am old enough to be your father; you are a very lovely girl, a

pretty kid, and you have your own young lover, a very nice lad . . .”

“No, no,” sobbed Melody.

“And, besides, Melody, I am your Grandfather’s friend, in his house. Do you understand, Melody?”

Melody couldn’t, or wouldn’t hear. “Take me, take me,” she said in a husky voice.

“Shut up,” said Mr. Vanderdonck, roughly.

* * *

So Mr. Vanderdonck has standards! And Melody’s evidence against him, and against Frieda, had been based on a day-dream! Ephemeral evidence, indeed (intangible tort), but they don’t *hang* people on cobwebs, they use rope! For a split second I doubted myself, too; had I made up the fiancé’s kiss? I put my finger to my lip where his teeth had bruised it; it still hurt. “No,” I answered myself, “there was a blunt instrument used.”

I was thinking like this as I sneaked back to my room, and in a few minutes Melody came in.

“Mr. Vanderdonck,” she said, indignantly, “tried to kiss me again.”

Her eyes were clear and true, her tone absolutely convincing. I made no attempt to figure it out; out of context, I had to believe her! and as I wasn’t supposed to be eaves-dropping, even unintentionally, the evidence of my senses was worthless. I made another sortie downstairs and brought up with me my sister’s novel, just to relax my wits a little. I skipped a few chapters and read: “‘Take me,’ said Lady Doris, desperately. Her lover shuddered. He was an honorable man; this wasn’t cricket. ‘Oh, my sweet. . .’” I put the book down; so Mr. Vanderdonck has read it, too!

"Russe, get out of here. You smell awful." Why must Russe roll in manure and then come and sit directly under my nose as if he had just come from Elizabeth Arden's?



Sunday: At lunch I am watching her come in and out the swinging pantry door when Dr. Pynchon, just as suddenly as he had announced Frieda's pregnancy (Frieda is enormous) says, "I was mistaken, Frieda is not pregnant."

"But, Doctor!" I remember Leda Vanderdonck starting out.

"Don't let's talk shop," said Dr. Pynchon, "how's for some chicken, Vanderdonck," and he lifted his plate over and across me to Mr. Vanderdonck, who was carving at the sideboard. "Vanderdonck! Chicken, a wing!"

Mr. Vanderdonck was staring at Frieda, who stood in the pantry door. His face was bright red. Frieda's was white.

"Is this it!" I thought.

Frieda said, like a stolid little girl, "I am *so* pregnant."

"Well, well, my dear," said Dr. Pynchon.

"Shall we have coffee in the living room," said my Aunt.

All I could think was, "But Frieda told me it was *clams*." I wanted to go behind the scenes and comfort her; I felt that this was a climax, but I did not like to put her in the awkward position of having lied to me. But Frieda's mental prestidigitation can't be called lying. In spite of her size, her exoteric symptoms, I had believed her when she told me she was not pregnant and had even made myself out an innocent little fool by telling Melody of my belief. Had Dr. Pynchon believed her too! But now she says she "is so" pregnant! I am disconcerted; perplexed.

I fed Russe his handsome Sunday dinner and came back into the library. Dr. Pynchon was the center of attention.

"Tell us more about false pregnancy, Pynchon," Mr. Vanderdonck was saying, "my bitch, Hilda . . ."

"I do wish you would not use that expression; it's so unnecessary," said my Aunt, "it's quite uncalled for."

"My bitch Hilda's breasts," (exit Aunt) Mr. Vanderdonck illustrated with his hands (he seemed quite elated about something) "swelled up like this, you know; she's a fine little bird-dog, a Brittany Spaniel; I paid four hundred for her, well, Pynchon, her breasts were full of milk. She hadn't even been in heat this season; I took her to the Vet., you know, old Charlie MacDonald, very good man. He said, 'It's false pregnancy.' Yes, sir, her tits were bright pink."

"Poor little girl," said Mrs. Vanderdonck, "just imagine wanting babies like that."

Mrs. Vanderdonck's own breasts, half out of her Hattie Carnegie cocktail dress, and Mrs. Vanderdonck still brown all over from last Summer, looked like russet apples. The whole family used to sun itself, nude, on the roof of the old porte-cochère, and when someone drove in, one of them would stand up to see who it was, absolutely naked, it was usually Leda, and say, "I haven't a thing on, I'll be down in a minute, my dear, just a second."

* * *

Still Sunday: I know where, over at the Vanderdoncks', the medical books are kept, the inspiration of some of Dominick's lewdest remarks. Dominick makes use of his wide reading, usually instant, and it gives his conversation vitality, and makes people look up; startles them into giving him their attention. The Vanderdoncks don't think much of Miss Heminway as an amanuensis for Dominick, but

they are generous, and she is destitute. "Destitute of sex," says Dominick, and Leda says, "Besides, the house has to be vacuumed *once* in awhile."

They had special shelves built in their house in out of the way places, even in the cellar, the bathrooms, the pantry near the cookie jar and under the beds. They were adjustable by means of a series of pegs and as Dominick grew they were raised for his unknowing convenience; in the beginning they were practically on the floor so that he could creep to them and poke his sticky little nose between the pages and look at the pictures. On these shelves were placed forbidden books. Arbitrarily chosen by Mr. Vanderdonck, the selection, if you can call any old thing, a selection, was catholic: serious, humorous, silly, salacious, literate, illiterate, historical, medical, nature studies, scientific, mathematical, about the stars, how to make fudge, mix drinks, The Kinsey Report, if it had been written; books on mayhem, nepotism, frigidity in women, torture (medieval), Chinese copulation; the complete works of Robert Louis Stevenson, *Alice in Wonderland* and a doctor's report on an autopsy on Byron's brain; Arnold Bennett, Henry James; *The Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and of Madame de Lespanesse; Bulfinch, Frazer's *Golden Bough*, *Dominique*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*; *Pamela*, Chitty on Blackstone, *Paul and Virginia*, Gandhi's autobiography, Proust, of course; the *Heptameron*, *The Princess of Cleves*. Old volumes of *La Vie Parisienne* were cheek by jowl with bound copies of *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Chicago Tribune*. DO NOT TOUCH read the sign in each place and VERBOTEN DEFENSE DE TOUCHER . . . Mr. Vanderdonck called it, "Exposure to the great ideas method of education."

"*But*," Mr. Vanderdonck would say, "*never lead* a lad to learning; tell him it is forbidden, it's a secret, it's illegal, poison, anything; take advantage of the contrariness in the young, which, unfortunately, by God, they lose as they grow older, tell um, 'No!' and by God, if they've any guts they'll do it. That's how I handle Dominick; he's an uncouth little bastard but the women will clean him up later; he's smart and he's informed; he's no sissy, but I don't forbid it; he's read all about homosexuals, and that information was on the four foot high shelf; that's the height to nip it in the bud. I keep track of his reading that way and by his vocabulary; if I especially want him to read something I hide it; he finds it. I've seen his little backsides sticking out from under the bed in the spare room areadin' the Old Testament with a flashlight. Abe Lincoln that boy is! Ha, ha, ha! And it's such a good system, he's never caught on to it; he thinks it's forbidden, and so it's fun. He's a real amateur and there's no better educated person than the amateur. Formal education? It's a racket!"

Dominick led the way, "Pregnancy, this way," he said, "embryos to the left, foetuses upstairs in the mater's dressing room; but take it easy, it's forbidden."

"Forbidden?"

"I call it civil disobedience," said Dominick. "This explains everything," he went on, "I doubted that that Portuguese Nun had exposed her virginity to rape. I knew she was frigid . . . Noel?"

"Yes?"

"Let's."

Dominick was cleaner than usual, his eyes were deep and warm, he was taller this year and reached to my shoulder. His "let's," a language half way between childhood and

manhood, affected me for the first time with something besides the microscopic kind of curiosity, dialectic, almost, I had hitherto felt, a cold but vivid want; this time I felt seduction creeping over me, as if I, too, had grown up. It was not like vivisectioning a frog, looking at nakedness, visual excitement only, it was warm and dangerous, an integration, like before going to sleep; intellectual disintegration but physical balance: cohesive. But Dominick made a typical mistake: instead of taking advantage of the perfect moment he began to make plans.

"Upstairs," he said, "in cook's closet, come on, quick, Noel!"

And I fell apart; that part of my brain that was prudent advised me, perhaps, or I just plain cooled off. I didn't *like* Dominick; any more than I did the stripling, and I remembered that lad's attempt to animate me on the piano bench. The image of Frieda, pale and misshapen, her illusory motherhood, her sorrow, her funny stubbornness came back to me and I felt I had neglected her.

"Nonsense, Dominick, find me that medical book, and besides, Smarty, Frieda isn't a virgin. She was married for ten whole years."

Dominick, as quickly over his passion as I, looked at me with complete contempt.

"She is so," he said.

He spoke with authority. So does everyone. Everyone is sure but me. I must lack character. We found the book and examined it; it said, under Pseudocyesis; Phantom Tumor; Spurious Pregnancy . . . well, it described just exactly the symptoms of both Hilda and Frieda.



Still Sunday: It was nearly dark when I got back to the house; I walked in on Dr. Pynchon (still there!) standing in the hall, and Leda. She was facing the door, and the twilight, the tomato-red glow in the West shone on her face and bosom through the glass. The reflection was in the pupils of her big eyes, too, like blood. The doctor was not oblivious to this show, either. She looked so radiant. He slid his big hand up her arm, thumbing her blue veins; slipped it under her short sleeve.

"Vanderdonck's a lucky dog," he said, "you're a beautiful woman, ripe as a plum; I'd like to get my teeth in you."

"I must go and piddle. I haven't had a minute all day," she said, laughing pleasantly.

"Well, I'll run along. I've got a patient, confound it," said the doctor, "ta, ta!"



I went to bed and could not sleep. The house was so still; it kept creaking as if it were trying too hard to be still, the way my teeth snap when, tense, I am about to eclipse myself. A beautiful picture, like an advertisement, of a glass of milk and three crackers, slid into my head as if I were a projector. I looked at the wall and saw the moon reflected there; "It, too, is the color of pale blue milk," I thought. It came to me: I was hungry; half asleep, I dreamed of milk and I don't like milk. "I will go and get a glass of ginger ale and a banana," I said, and I went down in my bare feet, whispering, "Russe, Russe, where are you, I don't want to step on you, it's me, Rüsse, don't bark." Through the small, square glass in the pantry door I saw, like a Dutch Interior, the pink uniform and the tweed suit, well lit from above; the background rosy; the glass gave it

that well-kept, varnished look; it might have hung in the British Museum. Looking down, as I had been, in the dark, to avoid startling Russe by stepping on him, my hand was already on the door, that had responded immediately and silently to my touch. It was open an inch and I dared not move: Frieda was sobbing. Mr. Vanderdonck was saying, "You should be *glad* . . . Jesus, Baby, I was relieved." . . . This is no Dutch Interior; this is an autopsy! through a fluoroscope! I let go the door and ran, as if the stallion were behind me again (*vis a terge*) up to my room. In my fear, my course was true, I avoided obstacles like a blind cat. Nothing crashed.



Things have quieted down but my brain is still tinkering with the machinery, I feel as if I had taken apart an old clock and I can't put it together again. It is reassembled but little pieces still lie around on the work-bench: Mr. Vanderdonck's standards, for instance, have split in two; the clock ticks with one set, but what to do with the other? I saw and heard him refuse Melody, but he had helped himself to Frieda; "Don't cry, Trinket," he had offered her in reparation. Frieda, a trinket? Then Melody was a jewel, perhaps. All right, let's put the jewel back in the clock. And Melody's intuition ("It's Mr. Vanderdonck"), was based on nothing logical, except, maybe, the tenuous logic of lies? And Frieda, who couldn't, according to the books, have simulated the symptoms of pregnancy without being herself certain of her state, willing it, by a tremendous desire that it be so, to happen, had nevertheless denied it to me! . . . Ahh! The superstitious Frieda! Her terse rebuttal, "I am empty," how sweetly and calmly she had said it;

without the previous, heartfelt lamentation. Knowing, at last, that she was pregnant, successful in her symptoms, beginning with nausea and, no doubt, cessation of menstruation (she no longer bled; she was healed) she could not bring herself to announce it. She must not "tempt Providence." And so she denied it, being certain of it. The only screw left on the bench is a set of Mr. Vanderdonck's principles, but I don't know which set makes the clock tick. At any rate, on Frieda's bureau, in a plush box, is a little gold-filled charm bracelet (trinket?) and Mr. Vanderdonck has bought himself a pair of Purdy balanced shotguns for the timberdoodle season (what a good boy am I!), light hearted. Dominick says they cost his old man two grand. (Dominick said Frieda was a virgin!) What's that over there under the slide-rule? Another screw? Frieda's maidenhead! (I apologize for the length of my metaphor, but let me play with it a little longer; sometimes things get solved by setting them up in the other alley.) Melody was lying when she said it was Mr. Vanderdonck, but it was Mr. Vanderdonck, so maybe Dominick isn't lying, and Frieda isn't a virgin. But Dominick's authoritative manner, his access to authority, besides: the jurisdiction of his four foot shelf; and his genuine contempt for my ignorance, added to my having made so many mistakes, my very eyes deceiving me, my ears deluding me, makes me wonder if, maybe, it isn't so; that Frieda is a virgin. That would explain everything; I mean that would explain, as it were, nothing: no baby. She could have, with her creative imagination, invented the big blond husband with skin like a peach, or he could have been real and Frieda frigid, as Dominick maintains: frustrated, he left her. She could have made up the whole thing, ashamed, of her coldness, her lack of ability . .

But I can't get rid of Mr. Vanderdonck so easily; even if I tried to burn that great tweed suit in the furnace there'd be a pile of ashes a foot high, and the stench! The stripling is easier, he isn't here anymore, and how capable was he? No more so than she? But he's not here, and so, doesn't exist. (The only way to solve the problem is to turn to pragmatism perhaps; stick to logic.) Of course there's science: if Dr. Pynchon, next Sunday, between helpings, raises his head and says, sotto voce, "You know, it's very interesting, Frieda is a virgin," I'll drop the whole thing. That would eliminate the lot of her circumstantial lovers; none could boast of Frieda, then; my innocent little Swede; so good that she desired a kind of virgin birth, prayed for a miracle with holy precedent; imitation is the sincerest flattery. And the nebulous little embryo, even if only imagined, is better off featureless than criss-cross bred as he could have been, with the eyes of, the nose of, the stature of; why, every male in the environs has been seen or heard with Frieda, excepting my Grandfather, and Dominick. Dominick! Dominick? So that's how he knew!

Exhausted, I went to bed, a kind of hangover in my brain from too much solution, trying too hard to put that clock together; but I heard someone running up the stairs.

"Hello, Noel, I'm back."

"Brady, you aren't here, you don't exist. *Please* go away, the clock will stop."

"You sound crazy, Noel, but I didn't mean to wake you up, see you later."



I am feverish again, and I have a stomach-ache, not very bad, and not all the time. Dr. Pynchon is coming to see

me . . . I heard him outside my room, his voice is loud; he was saying good naturedly, “. . . she’s balmy, now she says she’s a virgin, in all my practice I’ve never seen the like of it.”

“Good morning, Noel, playing sick? What nice pink cheeks.”

He sat down heavily on my spindly desk chair, eclipsing it; taking in the room at a glance (everything in it, and what everything in it meant in relation to his patient and her symptoms; it was part of his diagnosis) like a pilot glancing along the instrument panel, noting everything.

“Dr. Pynchon, I couldn’t help hearing you; is Frieda really a virgin?”

“Eh! Eh? Let me see your tongue, hmmm; Frieda?”

“Yes. What did you say, Dr. Pynchon, when Frieda said she was a virgin?”

“My exact words, eh? ‘Well, well,’ I think I said, ‘well, well, my dear, the customer is always right.’ Are you going to put that in your diary, Noel?”

“I don’t keep a diary. I just keep this nasty little book with my temperature in it; I wish I didn’t have to, please.”

“Oh, yes; yes, indeed; let’s see, here; very neat, very clear. 99.4 . . . 99.6 . . . 99.2 . . . 2 . . . 4 . . . 100.2 . . . Mmmm. Just turn your back to me, that’s it, take it easy.”

I took off the top of my pyjamas.

“Now say, ‘ninety-nine’; again, again; now say, ‘ninety-nine,’ and cough, not so hard; that’s right, good. Cover up, now; how are your bowels?”

“All right.”

“Let’s just see that tummy, now. Pain? here? here? does that hurt?”

All this examination is rhetorical, it doesn’t matter what

I answer. This has been going on for a long time; years.

"This time," Dr. Pynchon said, "we'll try bed-rest for a while and see what happens to that afternoon rise; have you read *Whispering Smith*? I'll bring it to you."

Dominick came to see me. He wore jodhpurs, elegant ones, and his legs looked long, high; and a jersey, yellow. He brought me a big pomegranate, blood red, and as he held it out to me he looked so pretty, like a little male Eve.

"Have your bowels moved?"

"Oh, shut up, Dominick."

"Can I sit on the bed?"

"Everybody does," I said.

He was so light and never completely relaxed that he didn't make much of an indentation and I didn't slide toward him the way you do toward a heavier body that sits on your bed, and makes your feet hot, and throws you off balance, like sliding sideways down hill. Dominick sat looking down at his boots; he examined the slit at the cuffs of his riding pants; how beautifully they fit, wrapped tightly around his calves, clinging to his small knees; he ran his hand up and over the top of his curving thigh; he was thoughtful, turned and looked into my eyes. I remembered Leda Vanderdonck, buxom, apple-breasted, her big thighs, and small feet. Did this beautiful boy come out of her? How easily he must have slipped out with no hips like that. Did she notice it at all?

Dominick said, "What do you do, in bed?"

"Nothing."

"It must be awful to be a girl and have nothing to play with."

"What do you mean, nothing?"

"Just what I said, just plain *nothing*," and he looked at me impudently, holding my eyes with his.

"Nothing," he repeated, "what *good* is it."

I felt myself fighting a hard blush that took hold of me by the ears. I knew what he was talking about. And into my mind came one of those family Sundays: "He masturbates," said Leda brightly, speaking of Dominick, and: "Do him good," said her husband. (I remembered my Aunt's face, "I think that's a little *too* much," and she left the room like an affronted girl; we heard her door slam upstairs.)

I had no place to look but at Dominick and I couldn't let him tease me like this, show my embarrassment, so I answered him in kind.

"It's better than what you've got; isn't it *uncomfortable*, all that?"

But Dominick was serious again. "Noel?"

"Yes."

"Let me see how much you've got up there now, have you got anything?"

I unbuttoned the top of my pyjamas; I was proud of my new, round breasts. I arched my back and felt as if I were on the prow of a ship. The cool air in the room, rather than my feelings, raised the nipples quickly; they were bright pink. (Hilda's tits are bright pink!) Dominick stared without moving; he looked from one to the other, his eyes moving in concentric circles as he took in each breast and its small circumference.

"Push them together," he said, making a motion like closing an accordion.

I did, watching my own breasts instead of Dominick's eyes.

"They're good ones," he said.

His curiosity seemed satisfied. But my skin got used to the temperature in my room and the hard, bright nipples subsided; now they looked like round strawberry stains.

"What's happened to them?" asked Dominick, his interest reviving. "Can you make them stick out again?"

I remembered Frieda's hands caressing me that night and the memory alone, vivid, raised the nipples.

"Noel!" cried Dominick, delighted, "you're smarter than I thought, a girl has got something."

I closed my pyjamas; but Dominick stayed.

"I can teach you something," he said, "it's too bad you aren't a boy but maybe girls can, too . . . I can't find anything about it."

I knew he was thinking of his books. "Can what, too?"

"You know."

I turned my head away and reached for the doorknob: I opened the door a bit and whistled shrilly. "Russe, Russe," I called. Russe bounded up the stairs and into my room. "Sic'im Russe, sic'im."

But Dominick put his hand on the big dog's head and Russe circulated his whole rear end with pleasure, his tail describing huge circles (Oh, Russe, you fool), not before he had crudely nuzzled between Dominick's legs to find out what he (Dominick) was thinking. Dominick laughed as he let him do it. "That's how they know if you're angry or pleased," Dominick explained.

"I know," I said.

"Some very good Docs," Dominick continued, really warming up to his subject matter, "can smell what's wrong with you from the door, but that's easy. Physiologically, it would be much more significant to do some research on the

urine, and then train some specialists, like tea tasters, only smellers, of course; I think that would be very important, don't you, Noel? Of course the whole body exudes odors, I suppose, the armpits especially, but that's different; that's controlled by the food you eat and takes longer, but the other is immediate, especially if you're scared, haven't you noticed it? I used to get so excited playing tag I . . ."

"Oh, Dominick, do shut up!"

"But it's *interesting*! Don't you want to learn anything?"

"You've exhausted the subject," I said, "and I'm supposed to be having bed-rest."

Dominick looked at me; I saw his eyes move down my torso. As his glance questioningly caressed me I felt a thin, sweet pain on the surface of my skin when his eyes hesitated, as if some one were vaccinating me with a pin. I saw the look of a little saint come over Dominick, an intentness, a stillness, but as if he, personally, were absent. I've seen it before in him; his identity disappears; I think I do, too, for him; and very sweetly, so touching, he says, at least remembering my name, "Noel?" Russe, who had been watching us, his nose between his paws gave a sonorous growl.

Dr. Pynchon walked in without knocking and snapped on the lights; and Dominick left. My cheeks were hot.

"Ah, the afternoon rise," said Dr. Pynchon, and then, "What do I smell?"

"Russe," I said, but I wondered.

"A special this week," he said as he slipped the thermometer under my tongue, opening his own mouth to help, "two sits for the price of one."

"Frieda," I thought.

My Aunt came in, too, to chaperone; it is *comme il faut*;

but I have often wondered if, once, long ago, there had not been something between them; not much but something. I watch, now, and Aunt is acting: she touches things lightly, smells a flower, almost pirouettes, and the old doctor looks amused, a little intimate, as if he knew all about her. ("Ah, well, well, my dear.") Well, maybe that throat corseted and sustained now by a boned, lace collar had once been round and soft, maybe the flat chest had had curves and pink nipples, and the thighs had wanted to guide something besides a horse, and did. But Dr. Pynchon, who smells strong, like a musty library, I see no past, or future, for him, and can imagine nothing, so I let it drop.

I am weary; so tired; I am pale again but no sooner have they gone when Mr. Vanderdonck comes in, with a big bunch of tube roses from Max Schling.

"How's the bellyache? May I kiss you or are you a menace?" He does, and adds, "Calculated risk," and licks his lips that are a shade darker than his pinkish beard and outlined by it as if he wore lipstick. I smell Leda's perfume on his tweed jacket.

"*Whispering Smith*, where did you get that? I've got something here a little more informative, a little juicy, too." and he takes out of his side pocket a small red leather volume, *The Golden Ass*, and out of the other side, *Manon Lescaut*. "Keep your tastes simple," he said, "don't be a Bas Bleu; a woman's education depends on her taste in men."

Leda came in the open door. "Henny!" she said, almost unable to speak with laughter. "Noel, darling, hello. Get down, Russe. Henny, Dominick is so *funny*."

"What's up?"

"But really, pet, what has he been reading, now? He wants a *specimen*!"

"A what?"

"From *me*; of urine!"

"Good God," spluttered Mr. Vanderdonck, his face red with astonished amusement, 'the cocky little bastard!'"

"He says he has to run some tests, it's important, and I'm so volatile it will be economical to use me! But Henny, sweet, you know how I am about some words, please don't let him say 'urine' and 'urinate.'" She wrinkled her nose. "It has a thin, stale sound, I hate it, it reminds me . . ."

"All right, Leda, all right, spare the patient; another time for your memoirs; but what do you want him to say?"

"Piss, I want him to say. Piss is a good word; it's hearty and clean, but 'urinate' . . . ugh, don't let him."

"I'll see what I can do," said Henny.

And after they left I thought that Leda's fastidious discrimination was apt: one is a sound, not unpleasant; the other, as she described it, "thin and stale" and, according to Dominick, we are too inhibited to appreciate the language of smells—yet. I heard Leda go into the bathroom next to my room and Mr. Vanderdonck must have been standing at the door; anyway their voices are loud.

"Henny pet, you shouldn't lend those books to Noel, she isn't Dominick; *Manon* . . ."

"Why not?" he interrupted, "and you accuse *me* of the double standard. She can read with one hand as well as he can."

Leda exploded with laughter, "Henry!"

My cheeks are hot again, my head is full of visions.



I was too tired to write anymore yesterday. I had so many callers. Bed-rest! Neither could I sleep last night; my legs ached as if I had climbed a mountain and I lay wide awake while my visitors chatted in my head and hurried through it as if they were in Grand Central Station, all taking different trains. At daybreak I relaxed and had a short, sweet sleep. Frieda brought me my breakfast.

"Good morning, Miss." She is reserved and cool to me as if I had offended her; I, the only one, possibly, who hadn't.

"How is my Grandfather?"

"He does not eat, Miss."

"Frieda, come and see me tonight after you finish the dishes, will you? Do, Frieda."

"Yes I will, Noel."

Brady, too, came in last night, through the kitchen door and up the back stairs; he has never come back for a lesson and avoids the front of the house for fear of seeing my Grandfather. But neither do I think he is seeing Frieda. I soon learned the purpose of his visit: it was to boast.

"I am giving Genie music lessons."

I thought of his abortive tutelage of me, astride the piano bench. Poor Genie! ("Hi Empress your pants are down.")

"And she isn't as cold as you are, Noel," he finished.

I looked at him scornfully; I felt my lip coming up over my front teeth and at the same time, recognizing the sensual power of his body, glowing and hot, his lower lip and jaw relaxed, his eyelids heavy, his blond hair damp and clinging, I felt a physical disgust, so strong that it was dangerous, being the response that it was. It was a response and it was physical; my scorn was an intellectual reaction, a moral aversion. To come and boast to me of Genie!

Fresh out of her arms, the soft and timorous Genie, grateful and winning; ruined forever. Why he was still wet! All my growing fatigue and left-over imagination gathered itself up; all the strength that had been resting, all the dormant frustration and irritability of a fortnight, even my dreams and abortive loves, my quick desires and stifled impulses, my curiosity, my love of nature, my funny affinities, rose as one man, as if a sentinel on a wall had signaled, and in the whitest hottest temper I had ever felt I yelled (but not as completely out of control as I could have been because I was saving just a little to kill him if he did not go), "*Get out of here!*"

He was terrified; he stepped back; glanced at the window, the door, as if to choose between them for the safer exit, I began to shake and tears came into my eyes, and he saw he was safe.

"Aw, come off it, Noel, I only . . ."

A slight strength ebbed back into me. "Brady," I said, "leave Genie alone or I will tell Frieda."

I felt the weakness of my threat. Brady had reached my door, and he looked down at me over the lamp that exaggerated, lighting his face from beneath as it did, his soft and sensual features, if you can call anything a feature that is lost and melted into everything else with no definition at all; simply an expression, an expression of lust, was left.

But his mouth opened. "That little," and then his mouth went together again and he pronounced the word so intimately, brutally—"bitch!"

How did he know that I was through, tired out, could not kill him? But empty as I was emotionally, as if I had thrown up, I wondered, as I lay quite exhausted, limp, at the metamorphosis of the stripling. I saw him a short while

back listening to heavenly music, on the verge of becoming a lovely reed himself, a sweet instrument. Between the old man's knees he had looked so slim, a kind of elegance to his stance, his bent but eager listening head, his tender response to beauty. And if his love for the old man had seemed perverse and the old man's for him too delicate effeminate, strange, wasn't that, no matter what its implications, better than this? Wouldn't it have saved Genie, even Frieda, from bestial insult? And me, Noel, from being shaken by my terrible repulsion for him as if he were handling my intestines!



Frieda did come up to see me. Whatever her neurosis, it is very becoming; and what willpower she must have, how sedulous her day dream! I wonder if she plans it ahead, or if it awakens her in the morning like the telephone. She is slim again, exactly as she used to be. I am tormented by my interest in Frieda and her accomplishments, her hold on everyone in the house, her effect on everyone's behavior; without Frieda I wouldn't know anything about anybody, and yet she tells me nothing. "They" seem to be speaking for themselves, but it is certainly Frieda who animates "them." Frieda is the star.

"I can't stay," she said almost immediately.

"Why Frieda?"

"Mr. James."

"But he must be asleep."

"No, he wants me."

"But I want you," I said suddenly, not meaning to, and not knowing what I meant. I was exhausted intellectually and my feelings spoke out loud, and after announcing them, they crept over me.

It was true. Frieda, always alert, leaned over me.

"Noel," she said, not like Dominick, questioningly—"Noel?"—but, "Noel," a statement.

And not like Dominick, the male, making plans (cook's closet!) but like a woman, fearless, she lay down quickly beside me. A funny semi-anaesthesia weakened me. I felt uneasy, a tiny nerve over my upper lip began to jump.

* * *

The door Frieda had closed opened just as softly as she had closed it.

"Noel?"

I lay still.

"Noel?"

I did not stir. I felt him lean over and stare at my eyelids.

"Noel?" he whispered.

He turned down the sheet and waited. I did not move. He carefully, gently, undid me completely and looked at me. In the half light I felt my body shine, he saw all of me, only my eyes were dark. Then I sensed, chilling me, a hesitance, a listening; I opened my eyes and looked and he was listening, his head turned to one side. (What was that!) Stillness, so complete that it was frightening. Dominick was as still, as motionless, as a rabbit that a dog smells but cannot see.

* * *

What happened was: I could not stand it forever: Dominick motionless and unidentified like that, like one of the Marys at an empty tomb, and I pretended to sigh in my sleep. I

moaned and turned on my side, still absolutely naked. Dominick quickly and dexterously covered me to the chin but he did not go away; with his hands he molded the sheet to my body.

"Wake up, Noel, I am making a statue of you," and he did not miss an inch of me; his fingers went into my armpits, gently separated and rounded my knees, designed my thighs that were tense, expectant; they went up close, so close, between my legs, into the two halves of me, behind. My mouth swelled up, my eyes felt like two deep holes and I went into a kind of spontaneous black-out, but just before it happened, at the end of a long hall someone who was standing there turned his face toward me and it was Dominick. So beautiful!



I slept hard and long (for me) and when I woke up, the sunlight in my room, I felt like a ship coming into the harbor, which, during the trip, the storms, the gulf stream, the parties, has been forgotten, and gradually, but so slowly, the landmarks, the Statue of Liberty, the little tugs, the fog horn, maybe, the sirens, the gulls, are a return to reality. I am awake. Frieda is not there to meet me, nor is she in my mind, tormenting me, any longer. Something has been solved without any homework on my part whatever. Then I am not completely responsible? I feel relieved, and a sweet numbness, a sense of security enfolds me, soothes me, touches my eyelids, "Go to sleep." Slowly Dominick comes back to me and with him a sensitivity to my skin, a longing in my bones, but not insistent, a kind of silence; it all seems so sensible. Then I realize that my love which had only made me feel anxious, without content as it had been

before, now has just what it lacked: content. I love Dominick.

I remember the little deception that led to his making a responsive statue of me. I shall not tell him that I know he looked at me with nothing on. Neither of us (I know he will not tell me, either) is deceiving the other. It will be simple modesty, the modesty of Adam and Eve. I lay quietly, not doing all this thinking until now.

Frieda brought my breakfast; she gave me a quick, penetrating look but I had forgotten, I remember wondering if she knew, somehow, about Dominick.

"Miss Noel, sit up and eat your breakfast."

She lingered; still I did not remember.

"Noel?"

It came back to me! But "Noel?" that is the way Dominick speaks to me, not Frieda. I feel a nervous irritation as if some wound had not healed and was being fingered. Frieda has gone to the window and shut it down.

"Aren't you cold, Noel?"

"No, Frieda."

"What is the matter with her?" I rouse myself to think. She is different. How pretty she is! What does she want? What is she up to? I thought that this tormenting curiosity had gone!

"Did you hear the door-bell last night, Noel?" A sly look has come over her, she looks as mischievous as a little girl.

"Princess, what is it?"

"My husband came last night," she said, "and he left me something."

She looked so—"normal" is the only word I can think of—so like a bride at an afternoon bridge party telling her girl friends the happy shy news that her attitude forced

from me the inanity, "Oh, Frieda, I'm so glad for you."

Having told me, Frieda of the short tongue, the succinct speech, was about to leave but again she hesitated; she looked very serious. "I would like you to see it."

"It?"

"Him," she amended. "So get well soon, Noel."



This morning my Aunt brought me my breakfast; she said Frieda was not very well.

"Oh," I thought to myself, crazily going along with Frieda's premature lying-in, "naturally." But then I sat up.

"What is the matter, Frieda is never ill?"

Aunt busied herself, completely rearranging my tray. "I don't know but it may be that Jacko's call has something to do with it."

"Jacko?"

"Her husband."

I had never heard Frieda mention her husband's name; how did my Aunt know it? "Please get on with it, Aunt, I said irritably.

"Don't be impudent, Noel."

"But when did he come? How long did he stay? Is he as beautiful as. . . .?"

"Noel, calm yourself, of what possible interest is a common sailor's appearance to you?"

"How did you know he was a sailor?" (I didn't.) "Did Frieda tell you?" I felt suddenly jealous. "I didn't know you and Frieda were so friendly."

A queer look of pain came into my Aunt's face and I was sorry; it quickly followed by one of fear, then of an impotent anger, and I watched curiously. The expressions did

not melt into each other; they were each static, separate, as if someone were playing cards with her face, shuffling it. So Frieda and my Aunt! No, it isn't possible.

"Please, Aunt, I did not mean to be rude."

"You were," she said, taking advantage.

"Yes, I know," I said, controlling myself, in order to hear about Frieda's husband. (Maybe Aunt knows about his chest, his legs, even his small, hard stomach, no bigger around than a plate!)

"Did he stay all night?"

"Noel! I must ask you." My Aunt was back in character.

"But he's her husband!"

"It is unseemly for you to be interested in such things," she said. "he did not stay or see Frieda at all."

He didn't see her . . . then *how* . . . and in my frustration, and aggravated by Aunt's ridiculously prudish stand I could only think of Dominick's lowliest descriptive words to express what I felt in that "how," but her big eyes forbade me to speak out loud. It was as if exactly the same images were in her mind as mine and I was silent. Besides, I realized that Aunt could surely not have been told of the supersonic speed, the almost immediate consequences of what Frieda and Jacko were doing in the mental picture that fitted into that "how."

"He simply rang the door-bell. He merely left her something," my Aunt concluded.

"Oh." I saw no evidence from her expression that she understood the symbolic significance of her words, Frieda's words. But Frieda surely intended that I, Noel, understand.

"Is there anything you want, Noel? I am going riding."

"Yes! Wait, listen, how *big* was the package?" (*Artificial insemination!*) Before she could answer I had jumped out

of bed, and opening a cupboard, I found what I was looking for: a test tube from an old chemical set of Dominick's, and I held it up. "About this big?"

"Noel! You'll catch cold, get back in bed this minute; why are you so excited? It wasn't exactly a package at all." So she did know!

"Then they must have been alone together for a few minutes," I said. I said it patiently and added, pronouncing my words distinctly as if I were talking to a ninny. "To-do-it. They-had-to-do-it, didn't they? Otherwise, how-did-it-get-there!" I knew clearer, and more onomatopoetic words than these, as I have said, and longed to use them, but with my Aunt it was as if you had agreed not to use the English language in a pinch. But this time I was convinced it wasn't prudery; Aunt didn't know what I was talking about.

"You are feverish, Noël."

I suppose I am and I let her go. But no sooner is she gone than I think, "Not exactly a package?"

* * *

After lunch I decided to listen in the hall. It is true, everything and everyone had been coming to me as it does when you go to bed for a rest. But I couldn't wait for this situation to evolve naturally and then wait again for the telling of it by my callers. Besides, Frieda evidently was ill, and my beautiful Dominick was in the schoolroom until four; I had questions Dr. Pynchon would parry, and that I couldn't ask Mr. Vanderdonck. Leda was too overwhelming in her own right to attempt to lead her into analytical recesses and symbolic shades; you have witnessed the useless questioning of my Aunt. I believe, therefore, that I was

justified, at least it was excusable; in any event, I stole out in my pyjamas and in bare feet, hoping that Russe was out with the stallion in the woods, too, to hear if anything was being said down below about Jacko's midnight call; and what his mysterious equipment could be, packaged or not, that could, as it did, get Frieda with "it" ("Come and see it") without at least stepping inside!

After that I would like to know from Dominick's books, or from any source, what the statistics are, or precedent is, for premature births of less than twelve hours. As usual I did not question the reliability of Frieda's brief information expressed in her own peculiar vernacular, the symbolic patois, I had understood so well. I always believed Frieda and everyone else usually gives up his factual notions, too, in the face of the steadfast purity of her assertions. There is a special truth in them not to be denied. She never quibbles. Even the easy-going representative of science, Dr. Pynchon, respects Frieda, and only yesterday had said of her, "Anyone else would have miscarried, it's in the books, they all do, and we let them, but not our Frieda!"

And it is true Frieda had made no attempt to explain her sudden return to slimness and I remember Dr. Pynchon's other remark in the hall. "She says she's a virgin," and although he had added, "She's balmy," I think he meant that *he* was. Frieda does put one out of step.

I heard, as I stepped outside my room, a great roar from the doctor, apoplectic: "*It wets!*" And then in a low, serious tone, "Things are going a little too far."

• "No one can say it's mine," shouted Mr. Vanderdonck, and I heard him slap his thigh (whack!).

And, "Oh, Henny, don't be cruel," said Leda.

I slid back into my room as they started moving into the

hall and was in bed just in time to receive Dr. Pynchon there. But I asked him nothing; I had decided to find out for myself. I will got to Frieda's room tonight.



No one but Dr. Pynchon came to see me. Where can Dominick be? As I wait for the right time, and plan my opportunity to creep down the back stairs to Frieda I remember, but as if it were long ago, the double seduction: how Dominick, the little master (Master Dominick) eclipsed Frieda, the little hermaphroditic keeper of the seals, as it were (by the authority vested in me . . .); how I involuntarily forgot her, but how, with her perfect timing, she let fall sotto voce, inscrutable, at least placed in my path, an intellectual hazard, so that I turned aside. With emotional security within reach she seemed to know that a dialectic phantasy, an embolism, would clot my blood. The time passed slowly. Although I had decided to stop thinking and wait until I could act, see things with my own eyes, I thought, "Mary; how long did it take Mary? And how did Joseph who had refused to sleep with her, but it hadn't been Joseph, so there was no analogy there. Nevertheless, how long did Mary wait?" Even the New Testament is hidden, over in Dominick's house, under the bed. When he comes I will ask him; is there any reference to time? He will know. He did not come.

About 9:30, without any difficulty, I reached Frieda's door. I hesitated. I did not imagine it; it was quite clear, a sweet-treble, "Ma-Ma." It was followed by the low, tense contralto that Frieda used for special occasions. I could not make out the words. Tears came to my eyes and I trembled.

"Frieda," I whispered. I only whispered it, but she opened the door at once. Her finger was on her lips.

"He is asleep."

I wanted to go away, go back to my room; I was no longer curious, but Frieda closed the door behind me.

"Do you want to hold him?" she said.

Cradled in a box, which was plainly labeled: *Betsy-Wetsy*, I saw it. All I could think was, "But she said it was a boy."

"I have to go back," I said, "they'll catch me."

"No, wait, Noel, watch me change him."

She lifted the little rubber monster from its box, tenderly. She removed a soaking wet triangular rag from its foolish dimpled hips, but giving me a quick look, she turned it on its face.

"I had him so quick," she said, "he came so fast; he isn't developed yet."

And I realized with a throb of pity she was explaining its lack of male anatomy.

"Oh, that's all right," I said foolishly, as if I were the loser and didn't mind much. Half way up the thing's back, modestly placed there rather than between its chubby legs, was a hole covered with gauze. As she handled it and changed it, it said plaintively, staring into space with big blue eyes, "Ma-Ma, Ma-Ma."



I feel distressed and shop-worn; distressed over Frieda and her self-deception, shop-worn in my senses as if I had been handled too much and finally sent back. Frieda's synthetic baby with its almost obscene sensual appeal sits in my brain as if he were sitting on the toilet and this really ugly

metaphor indicates my state of mind, I suppose. Bed-rest! How exhausted I am. I have not seen Frieda nor asked about her. It is self protection; I cannot bear it: is she *nursing* it!

I think of Brady's contemptuous but intimate, "That little bitch," and I am so angry I can't sit still. Frieda! Frieda! Get up on a hill and stand there. Beautiful, pale Swede, why have you guided filthy hands to caress you? Why have you initiated, baptized and confirmed stinking unbelievers? . . . For a disgusting, pink doll that wets? Oh, Frieda, I am crying. Does the stigma (of a flower) enter the calyx? Why, Frieda, darling, didn't you tell me it was a *bee*. I would have believed you. If I hear any one laugh in the hall! Yes, what will I do if I hear any one laugh in the hall? How impotent I am. If I had a gun I would blow everybody to bits that laughed . . . "Bang!" Perhaps I am impotent, but how in tune I must be, because as I wrote it I heard it. "Bang!" What is it? Mr. Vanderdonck doesn't shoot the timberdoodle so near the house. Has something of Dominick's blown up? Please, Dominick, come and see me.

* * *

Dominick came.

"Dominick?" I said. I forgot the "Bang," the New Testament, Brady, Frieda.

"You know what, Noel," he said, "I am really getting somewhere with my idea; poor old Herbie." (Herbie is our Hereford destined for the locker, to be hung in strips on hooks.)

"Oh, no," I said, "not so soon."

"I mean, Noel, what we were talking about, don't you remember?" (Talking? No, we didn't speak.)

"Dominick?"

"It took three men to get to the little pen, then, you know, they squeezed him, poor Herbie, and when they got to his shoulders, so his head was down, they squeezed the blood spurted up two feet, look, it was bright red; I thought to myself, 'adrenalin,' there must be plenty of blood; it was bright red and it bubbled; fresh blood experiments; then, quick, they released him, and prodded him with a spear; he gave a great moan, a roar, as the air came back into him and, then, Noel, you know that fence in the corral that's about six feet, well, he took off and jumped over it easy. The men yelled, 'Look out!' and separated, and you know what Herbie did? Noel? ['Noel?'] I was right. He spread his legs, lifted his tail; raised up his head, his nose was running, and pissed!"

"Really?"

"So you see, Noel, that's where it was, the adrenalin, all right, and quick; but wasted, I didn't get a drop; but next time I'll get it if I have to wait 'til another season. Hello Noel, are you better? Imagine it, Noel, a six foot fence! He was hopped up on the stuff; then he pissed. He was free, Noel, and he pissed away his freedom. Why, they just walked up and took him; he was gentle as a heifer."

"Dominick, what was the shot?"

Dominick laughed. "You'll be delighted, that was the pervert," he said.

"Pervert?"

"Yes; Brady."

"What was Brady doing with a gun?"

"Running away from it, Noel; Genie's old man said if Brady didn't keep away from the Empress he'd fill him full of buckshot . . . Noel?" (At last.)

I did not answer but waited for his hands.

"Noel, I want to bring my plaster-of-Paris set up here and make a statue of you. Not a real one, a hollow one that you can step into if you want to. I can do it in pieces, a little at a time."

"Oh, yes, Dominick, do!"

"I won't do your face, it won't have a head, that's uncomfortable anyway, with only two straws to breathe through, but the rest you will like (yes!). It gets hot, though, it will burn your skin, do you mind?"

"I don't mind."

"I am coming back tonight."



To my surprise Dr. Pynthou came to tell me that he was going to let me get up for dinner.

"The change will do you good and Vanderdonck is bringing an old friend he knew in Germany, a little new blood in the old house; ought to do us all good."

"How is Frieda?"

"Tears, just tears; well, ta-ta, dress up pretty."

"Why is Frieda crying," I wondered, "now that she has what she wants?" I soon learned: the "old friend" of Mr. Vanderdonck's had been a student of Freud's.

"She must be separated from the child at once," he said, "at once!"

"But it's a doll, for Christ's sake!" yelled Mr. Vanderdonck.

"Not to *her*, Henny, pet," said Leda.

"Ganz richtig, Heinrich, mein Hertz," said Herr Professor.

"Hmmm," I heard Dr. Pynchon mutter.

"She will kill it, das ist sicher! Murder, meine Freunden!" he said, blowing his nose fiercely, and rolling his eyes, taking us all in. He had our attention but he dropped it. "You have much rain here, no?"

None of us, preoccupied, startled, answered, except my Aunt. "I think it will clear," she said.

"I ask you, Herr Doktor," he began again, turning to Dr. Pynchon, "and you answer me: she weeps, nicht wahr? She is sad, will not eat, refuses to nurse the child, nicht wahr? Ach, ja! Est ist immer so. Es ist ganz schlecht; a pretty woman, also, no doubt, ja, very pretty, and her husband, poor fellow; but to blame in his bungling way, very much to blame. I think so."

"She has been separated from her husband for ten years," said my Aunt. We all looked at the professor.

"So? So? Ach, gnaedige Frau! And you think it will clear? Nein, it will not clear."

Dominick, who had been staring at his father's friend, alert and interested, spoke up. "Is it a post partum depression, Sir, that is indicated, and if it is, you are quite right, she will smash the doll if she is left alone with it."

"Gott in Himmel! Ja, young man, I am quite right, am I? Listen to me, young man, it is not your business to say doll, smash the doll! It is murder she will do, murder! That is what she plans to do, intends to do, that is what she does!" He made a gesture of cutting his throat—
• "Zipe!" and concluded, more quietly: "Ach, poor woman, is it not so?"

None of us spoke. He banged the table, lifted his big hand and snapped his knuckles. "I do not care *dat* for what you call doll, das Püppchen, das kind, the victim. It

is the *patient*! Ja, the *patient*! Poor woman, she is murdereress in her mind. Sick."

We thought he had finished; he seemed exhausted, but he turned on Dominick again. "*Dummkopf*! I tell you die Püppchen ist eine Fingerhut, a symbol! Ach! You American doctors, you know nothing sensible, all is lost."

My Aunt once again said coolly, "Dominick is only fifteen, Herr Professor."

All the professor had left he put into, "Ach, Gott in Himmel! Nur fünfzehn! My colleagues will not believe it! He is matriculate when he is little baby then! Ach, you are in big hurry in United States. Big. Ach, Heinrich, mein Freund, where is the toilet?"

None of us had anything to say after the professor left the dining room, not even Dominick, and none of us knew what Dr. Pynchon's remark, made more to himself than to us, had reference to: "Stethoscope! Gad, I've got ears!"

Finally, Dominick, as we went out into the hall, said, "Come on, Noel, let's go upstairs and do you know what."

Leda gave a long musical laugh, hitting her notes perfectly, like a coloratura soprano. "Precious," she cried and enveloped him in her smooth bare arms.

Although Dominick is growing taller, Leda is what Mr. Vanderdonck calls "one of Homer's women," tall, long necked, rounded, of an Amazonian stance, and Dominick looks like a little cupbearer in the arms of a goddess. His profile is outlined for a moment on his mother's breast, like a gold coin on a velvet cushion and he is serious, adorable there. The levels of emotion of the evening seek adjustment in my heart and it beats fast; I feel it in my neck as if I had had an operation.

Dominick quickly turns his face inward and kisses his mother's breast, hard.

"Go and do 'you know what' with Noel now," and she gave him a gentle shove.

Dominick's back looked the way it used to when he was a little boy and she had told him it was time for bed, he could not bear to leave her; he looked, his legs apart, as if he would leap upon her, and he looked like that now.

"No, no, you will muss me all up," she said, "go and play with Noel, lover. Do, Boysie." She lifted away the top of her bodice and looked down it, "And you hurt me. Go away, sweet; naughty boy."

She looked for just a minute almost petulant, then her eyes shone on him in full for a brilliant split-second and she turned and went into the coffee room, just exactly as beautiful and thrilling from the rear as the front. This maternal flirtation stays with me like a medallion.

As Dominick and I take the first step up the stairs the Herr Professor reappears; Henny has his arm linked in his and he (Herr Professor) is laughing agreeably. As he notices me, he lets fall his monocle, and as quickly replaces it, lifting his lips to keep it there, "Ah, die schoene Maedl; we have not met Fräulein? (I sat next to him all through dinner.) You are running away?"

"I am tired."

"Tired? Ah, dat is amusing. Very amusing."

"Our little girl was just up for the evening, she has a sub-acute fever," and Dr. Pynchon, suddenly looking at me himself, without more ado, sticks a thermometer in my mouth and puts his fingers on my pulse. I feel ready to cry at such a public performance.

"Ach," says the Herr Professor, looking me over as if I were for sale, and immediately interested, or perhaps I should say, disinterested. With a thermometer in my mouth,

as usual I am perhaps invisible, at least I am deaf, brainless, without feelings or modesty and the two doctors discuss, without censorship, my daily habits, nocturnal sweats, the heat of my blood, the number of cells by the light of a candle to a square inch, red or white; the peculiar music of my lungs, the esoteric shadow suspected in them. "And the x-ray, what does she say, you read him?" asked Herr Professor, looking absently at my knees.

Dr Pynchon snorted and then blushed and now I understood his "Stethoscope! Gad, I have ears," and I wondered if he would add, "and eyes!"

"Es ist ganz bestimmt tuberculósis," shouted the Herr Professor. Then he took a breath and turned to Dr. Pynchon, "X-ray! X-ray! X-ray! You are fool!" and, "I beg pardon, my colleague," he almost sobbed, but Dr. Pynchon had reached for his coat and quickly fastened his arctics; he bowed from the waist, and with tremendous dignity said, "Good evening," and left.

"Aber was denn!" sighed the Herr Professor, spreading his hands, "I do not understand the Americans."

He turned and absentmindedly removed the thermometer from my mouth and held it under the lamp, drying it first on his pants (striped); it was doubly wet with my tears, too. He did not seem surprised at whatever he read although my own spastic and sporadic shivers, my burning skin and hot eyes were indicative enough of fever (to me). The Herr Professor makes a speech now, "The house is full of sick people. Ach! The old man upstairs is dying of insult; the kleine Swede is mad, sick with hate; die Tante is pathological crazy for love like little girl in first pants; she dies of immaturity. Ach! The young man die of curiosity. He is dangerous man one day. Ha! And Fräulein, mein Schatzli,

why you cry? You wish to die? Ja, it is so. You wish to die. Tubercul6sis is merely symptom! Take a walk: every day take a walk. It is good, sehr gut, walk! Naturlich. Auf Wiedersehen."



I have been sick. A gland swelled up in my neck; it hurt, grew hard, and went away suddenly, and with the disappearance of the swelling my fever went to the high fever, 104, that started the night Herr Professor was here and went away with him in the morning. If I had not heard from others reverberations of his visit I would connect him only with the feverish images in my brain that night and not believe that he was real. Dominick told me today that there had been a conversation, for instance, on the topic. *What is the future of the undersexed doll in our society?*, which grew out of Herr Professor's repeated statement that he did not "Give pffft. for Püppchen." So, even if he did, aber und naturlich, of what practical use would it be, and so forth; there are not enough beds for the sick as it is, ach Himmel!

Dr. Pynchon came back to see me as soon as the Herr Professor was well on his way to California and he looks older, as if his unsatisfactory duel with the German had scarred only him.

"Now that the fever is gone, how about a nice walk, but don't overdo it," he said.

And so Dominick and I and Russe took a walk. Hilda, the spaniel, would not come but lay brooding, her nose between her paws, her big eyes deep and tender, her short tail moving apologetically: "I don't feel good, some other

time, I'm not any fun." Russe, bounding and sneezing, went on ahead, returning to sniff at us, opening his big mouth, showing his scarlet tongue, his fine white teeth, barking and listening to his own bark, and off again.

"Noel, it's wonderful you are out again, shall I get Pop's gun in case of a rabbit?"

"No, let's just walk," I said.

I felt a little shaky and the cold air in my lungs made me cough but it was good out, so good. The ground was spongy from yesterday's thaw and today's freeze, the branches brittle, breaking off in twigs as we brushed by, the sky, a throbbing cobalt blue. We crossed the cornfield which made lumpy walking; in its very center last summer's scarecrow shivered in one of Mr. Vanderdonck's cast-off jackets and a worn pair of my Grandfather's striped pants; an old homburg, also of Mr. Vanderdonck's reached to what might have been the scarecrow's chin but was only a stick; one hand was gone, on the other a cotton, working-man's glove hung.

"Look," said Dominick, "his fly is open."

Across the field we came to the Vanderdoncks' vegetable garden, frozen and colorless, drab, except for the brussels sprouts, still producing, and a row of parsley that was huddling in the cold but bright green, veridian; a few violently purple cabbages. Russe was frantically digging, his face buried to the eyes, the rich, brown earth flying out between his straddled hind legs.

"Russe! Russe, stop it!"

"It's a delicious, smelly old bone he's after, leave him alone," said Dominick.

Russe looked round at us, his tail wagging hard, his grinning mouth wide open, saliva pouring off his tongue. Then

he went after it again, the muscles in his haunches rippling and shining in the sun.

"Ahh! What's he got," said Dominick, "*Drop it, Russe!*"

Russe obeys but lies on his stomach, panting, and pushes it with his nose. As he does so it calls out thinly, "Ma-Ma." Russe is on his feet, quivering, his tail curved under him.

"Jesus, Noel," is all Dominick says.

"Frieda!" I moan, and as all that comes to one at such times are the poetic clichés of the unstrung and the dying: "What have you done!" Equally horrified, Dominick and I turn away and look again. The pink, damp thing with chubby legs apart and dimpled, outstretched arms returns our stare. It is looking straight into the sun without blinking, its long, stiff lashes making dark, upright shadows.

"Oh turn it *over*," I say hysterically, and not making any sense, "don't *touch* it."

Then it moves. The diaphragm, that had collapsed from Russe's rough nudgings, punctured, perhaps, by a sharp tooth, slowly fills with air and it gives a convulsive little kick, a deep sigh.

"Let's go," said Dominick, "come on, Noel," and we each circle it with averted eyes, "*Come Russe!*" and we three went home.



Frieda is leaving us! She is calm, paler than ever before; has already changed from her pink uniform into a straight black dress; "*Chic*" says Mr. Vanderdonck and he makes a double gesture with his hands as if he were caressing a vase.

"Is she in mourning?" I wonder.

"It is hardly proper," says my Aunt, fidgeting, "she is still in service."

She announced her simply planned departure without preamble or excuse, expressed no regret, made no complaints.

"Madam, would it be convenient to write me a reference? I have finished here."

As you know, my Aunt has perfect control and, with the exception of her blushes, as if someone had spilled a bucket of blood over her head, at any allusion to sex, never turns a hair, as it were, at shock without bodily content. Without comment, she wrote the following: "To whom it may concern: Frieda Lind has been in the undersigned's service for twelve years. She is a satisfactory worker, honest, and clean. Louella James."

Frieda seemed to expect no more, no less. "Thank you, Madam."

"You are quite welcome, Frieda."

This domestic omega was sufficient occupation, it appeared, to erase any possible sentimental attachment between them that had been, after all, perhaps, only a question in my mind. I remembered the series of expressions on my Aunt's face, the alphabet of her emotions, that day in my room (Frieda and my Aunt!). And now the mistress and the maid are content, it seems, with a slip of paper, the conventional farewell between servant and employer. Frieda did not know how little my Aunt wanted her to go, for practical reasons. I am surprised to hear that she is, according to my Aunt, indispensable to my Grandfather. This sequel I did not expect; hadn't I said that with the exception of Dominick and my Grandfather every male in the environs might have contributed to the features of Frieda's

nebulous boy? Then Dominick had been eliminated. ("She is a virgin.") Now my Grandfather; he, too, spellbound? Frieda has boxed the compass, indeed. I listened to my Aunt's fretful review of Frieda's indispensability.

"You all know, now that Melody is away," she said, as if that was all.

"What, Aunt? You didn't make a sentence."

"But you know perfectly well that all the pleasure poor Papa gets is brushing her hair," she said impatiently.

So that was what Frieda meant: "Mr. James wants me"? And I remembered my sister's pained expression as my Grandfather combed and brushed hers—her long blond hair.

"Why does he *do* it, there is something *sinister* about it," she had said.

It is true, I had felt for her, too. The old gentleman used to wait in the hall for the shampoo to be finished, and then he would patiently and with evident pleasure untangle with his fingers, one by one, the fine shining strands, following it up with a combing and finally an interminable brushing; slowly he would bring the silver brush with yellow bristles down from the crown of her head to the undulating ends of her smooth hair, lifting it away tenderly and returning to the crown again. No one had ever commented on this strange scene and if it had not been for Melody's squeamish discomfort and pained expression it would have been beautiful, as beautiful as the boy between the old man's knees had been before the horrid dénouement, the sickly jilting, that had sent my Grandfather to his bed, for good, I am afraid.

Back in the semi-darkness of my consciousness I remember that other time when the old man had taken to his bed.

My Grandmother's death (her disappearance, to me) had almost caused his, so I was told, and I remember his closed door, the tip-toeing, the hushed conversations. Soon after, Frieda had come, and my Grandfather got better, took up the study, self-tutored, of Swedish; finally returned to his music; admitted that my Grandmother was dead. But this time Frieda, All Things To All Men, was leaving, and taking with her something away from the old man; his last, perhaps, sensuous pleasure; something that held his wavering attention. His mind no longer able to concentrate, his being already on its way, his senses still craved a lingering respite. This, at least, is how I suppose it is. We hear of the last words, heroic and touching, innocent, and generous, of great men, completely severed from evil, but what is the last gesture of the body that none sees or at least soon forgets? And of young heroes: *Give me Liberty or give me Death, I am sorry I have but one life to give for my country.* Is that flaring nostril defiance of the enemy or a desperate effort to smell, once more, the perfume of a woman? That gentle, swelling roundness of Nathan Hale, bound, waiting sweetly for destruction, the beauty of renunciation or pre-occupation, once more, with love? These are questions Miss Hemingway never answers for us. (That death mask of the girl, so beautiful, found drowned in the Seine, [it hangs on a hook in every Art School] has the rapturous look of a woman in the midst of love; was it the voluptuous movement of the Seine that pleased her so?)

"I shall send for Melody," said my Aunt, and I came back from my mental questionings to say, "I don't think so, it would not be the same."

"And why not?"

"I know Frieda, and the feeling was mutual, Melody only put up with it. Frieda has a talent for receiving pleasure as well as giving it, that is important sensually," I said, not noticing my Aunt's queer expression until I looked at her to see why she had not interrupted my funny display of a knowledge I didn't really understand.

"Dominick is a bad influence," she finally remarked, "and you are not to use vulgar words."

"Which?" I asked.

She hesitated. "Sensual," she said, and then, "... pleasure," and the bucket of blood upset, flooding her whole countenance.

"I'm sorry, Aunt, I won't," I said.

"And it is just as well," she went on, completely recovered, "as far as you and Melody are concerned that Frieda is leaving; she . . . she is a . . . she is just a *vagrant*."

It was as if Aunt had found a word for Frieda that satisfied some wound within herself that called on her to heal it and she looked quite weak from a kind of minor operation. (Ahh, it is gone now).



Last night Frieda waited on table for the last time and, with the exception of my Grandfather, we were all there. Without being told to, she wore her pink uniform and little organdy cap, pretty signet of domestic slavery, but she wore it like an ornamental nimbus. Each of us at our different levels is at ease according to training and ability but Frieda's savoir faire is genuine, without any affectation whatever; it is as if she had taken a course in "how to stand alone," but along with it another one, "without giving

offense." Mr. Vanderdonck is in his usual exuberant health and he brought a bottle of good claret for the occasion. As Frieda, modestly but with sweet, cool dignity passes the peas, Mr. Vanderdonck slyly raises his glass in her direction, bidding us drink, and says boldly, 'Vale.' And then, as Frieda, deaf and blind, rounds the end of the table, the little white tails of her starched apron fluttering against her pink behind. "La petite fille-de-chambre est très charmante ce soir, n'est-ce pas? Vive la bagatelle, hein?"

But there is something beneath his seemingly sophisticated horseplay that doesn't ring true. His attempt to undress Frieda with his jokes has been unsuccessful before and I know he feels, in some way, licked. Dominick stares at her without smiling and then at me as if he were trying to figure out something; his father's vulgarity does not touch him, neither does it shock him; he admires his father without any critical approach at all. Leda falls in with Henny's ribaldry and mood like an indulgent and amiable mistress. My Aunt, watching carefully to see that everything is correct, nevertheless is not giving her entire attention to her housewifely duties as she usually does. She is uneasy, wishing it were over; it is quite apparent. And Dr. Pyncheon strikes me, for the first time, as play-acting; his part: the family physician. Myself, my own behavior, I cannot describe or analyze, I only know I wanted to cry out, "Princess! Where are you, please stop it," but didn't.

I believe my face showed no concern but if someone were watching me as I was closely watching the rest perhaps they would have noticed that I did not eat, and took a second helping. It was if someone higher up had decided that there be no good-bys but I think it was Frieda. How telling her simplicity is, how Greek. She did not return to the drawing

room, with a suitcase, to speak and hear the dogma, to make people get up, to depart, to forget something, call a taxi; none of the odds and ends that irritate your brain and make you want to change your mind; that isn't Frieda; anymore than arbitration or compromise is in her character.

The doorbell didn't ring; there were no footsteps. But something has happened. Frieda has created a scene, nevertheless, if only a dramatic vacuum, a big pause: silence. No one speaks; no one makes believe, either. For the first time everyone shows a certain embarrassment. Isn't anyone to be given his cue? Where is the little animus; where is the common denominator? The star has walked out on the supporting players leaving them unsupported, perhaps . . . No matter . . . The Doctor does not wait for coffee but says he has a patient. No one wants to ask the imaginary patient's name and so we move toward the door as usual to say good-by, to look out on the night to see what it will be like tomorrow, out of habit, for each of our purposes: will Henny hunt, Aunt ride, Grandfather (if he were well) fish, etc. And I go out just to look at the night and smell it; I have no plans.

"Look!" says Dominick. The moon is full, the whole night is like a light blue day and half-way down the drive, one-dimensional in the thin pervasive light is Frieda's back moving away from us, a slim, *chic* figure like a cut-out, and beside her (they are hand in hand) a little boy moving easily along with her; you can see the edge of his short pants, they must be gray, and the top of his long wool socks, and in between what must be the backs of small round knees.

I could not stand there watching Frieda move away and yet not move away; I felt bereft and not bereft. Frieda

seems unwilling to part with her part, accept an understudy, as it were; it was 'as if she said, "Wait, don't bring down the curtain, don't go home, or if you do go home take me with you."

I came up to my room where I am writing this unsatisfactory report of Frieda's going away, but before I left, in that moment in which the print of Frieda and the little boy developed itself behind the retina of my eye, I heard, "Kidnapping!" and in parenthesis, "Ninety-nine years!" But that was in my own mind as if I were at the movies. "This ceases to be funny," someone else said, and Leda said, "Has it ever been funny," with real feeling, so much that Dominick cried out, "Mater, don't!" And so the chain reaction . . .



I forgot to say that little Genie found a perfectly good doll (the bright-eyed, orphaned doll among the strangled cabbages). It is *the* doll (Püppchen), but divested of its history it is sweet, placid, an intelligent looking little doll, clean and fresh.

"Oh, it's a darling, Genie," I said and meant it.

"It should *talk* but it's broken," she said. She lifted the doll over her head and waited; she shook it. I prayed that it would not speak and it said nothing, "But it wets," she said happily,

I . . .



I soaked the back of Frieda's uniform with my tears. Why did Frieda leave it out, still warm, stretched on the bed like a mauve shadow of herself, when she is so neat, so

correct, even the saltcellars have been emptied, the silver counted, the . . .



I am too bored to write, too languid; I have gone to bed of my own free will. Along with my imaginings, the fortitude of my brain that like a snake won't die until sunset, is a lassitude that makes me too lazy to reach for a pencil and if I do the point breaks, or do I break it? But I do not sleep either. My legs, from my pelvis to my ankles, ache just enough to keep me thinking things I have not the physical energy to transcribe. Now that I am ill evidently, everyone tries to make me laugh when there is nothing to laugh about; when I was well they made me cry.

"I am bored," I said to Mr. Vanderdonck.

"'Boredom and chastity are the best physicians,'" [Sandoz] he said. "You have the eyes of a Chesapeake Bay retriever," and I knew he was thinking of his timberdoodles.

Dominick, whom I feel I have lost somehow, by turning my attention back to Frieda, as I had, just when our love needed the concentration of the woman in me to keep it lit up, the way a powerful microscope stuns an amoeba, anaesthetizes a spider, comes to me with bits of information: birds have a temperature of 111. The weasel conceives in her ear. The camel is the only four-legged animal that has syphilis. Sarsaparilla is pharmacologically inert and therapeutically useless.

"Dominick is a curieux" (lover of picture books) says his mother. I wonder if all these items will add up, if they will make a man of him. I love his staccato innocence. It is useless to warn him of danger. Dominick only knows what he knows at the time like a scientist. ("How do we know what

will happen tomorrow when tomorrow is not yet here and we have not made a note of what happened?") Who will mother him? Leda is a place he has been, he can't go back. I listen as he tells me the story of sub-rosa (under the rose) and I lie and wait, the afternoon temperature slowly coloring my cheeks, listening to the beat of my heart as it increases with my simmering blood, and I ache with loneliness.

"Mater told me to keep my hands off you," Dominick says, "that I could talk to you, that's all; are you very sick, Noel?"

"I don't know."

"Noel, they caught a shark off Montauk Point and they found a whole brown terrier in its belly."

"Oh, Dominick."

"And it had its harness on!"

I must be sick; the strange fact of the whole terrier in the shark, panting perhaps, hysterical to get out, its hair standing on its neck, finally collapsing from want of air, but so greedily swallowed, not even digested, did not bother me much, but the distortion, as it were, the grim, as it seemed to me, detail of the harness filled me with horror. The slippery, wilted dog in a brand new harness from Abercrombie and Fitch . . . I shall never be able to forget it . . . And if the weasel conceives in her ear, what is it she listens to, does a sensuous tongue seduce her? "The fertility of words," I think, "the tongue is mightier than the testes, and teeth are the tombstones of lovers." but nothing makes much sense . . . I feel Dominick's eager tongue in my ear, pressing its way down around its convolutions like a virile corkscrew; then when the soft warm tip, palpitating, reaches its destination, it withdraws (ahh) and repeats its thrilling search, it is . . . I shiver with pleasure . . . and then in

the high room, his voice a shout that broke dishes in the pantry, hitting the ceiling ricocheting from the walls, and escaping through the keyholes in a series of squeaky sighs: "*Es ist ganz bestimmt tuberculósis!*"

* * *

As I reread the above I cannot say which was real and which was dreaming; I have not had enough sleep to know when I am awake and when I am simply played upon by words, dreaming with my eyes open; because Dominick did not know I was not wide awake. Although I heard myself call, "Frieda! Frieda!" he says I said nothing, that I was looking at him and smiling. I don't know if Dominick caressed my ear but as he reads me Petronius I watch for the tip of his tongue between his teeth and feel it there. I lie separate from him weakly content with what I have.

PART TWO

AT LAST I may write an hour a day; at least if it does not send my temperature up, and tomorrow I may walk as far as the gate and, turning my head, look down the long wide road that gleams like the equator and which, like it, encircles the earth, pausing at Phoenix, stopping at Chicago, New York, Siam, Brioni, St. Louis, Dresden and Princeton. And by the side of it, where I am, is the Big Desert-that-blooms-like-the-rose. And in the center of the big desert that has been bleaching for centuries, made up, as it is, of a fine dusty sand, the color of pumice; bones ground as fine as 'alcum (and when the wind curls itself up like a ribbon and drops in on us we are covered in a moment with that same powder which we will one day be and it stays with us, in our hair, in our hind-teeth, in my navel, under my eyelids; it coats and embalms-like a thin, dry calcimine . . . and the hard water which comes from God-knows-where won't dissolve it, you just have to wait and finally it settles) . . . in the center of this big desert . . . is the sanitarium, a sprawling comfort station, colorless like the sand, surrounded by gophers.

The little gray gophers think they can't be seen, so exactly the color of the sand they are, so all day long they fornicate in the open, in the hot sun, in absolute silence. Tense, never relaxing or resting, they leap and box and tremble with love; their whiskers vibrate, their tiny noses twitch, bright eyes grow brighter with selfish desire like a lot of dancing motes in the white light. This concentration on the rug over the earth, this almost invisible upheaval has held my attention for hours at a time. Everything else is in the shade: the tarantula, the gila, the scorpion, the rattlesnakes, luminously coiled, the coyotes sleeping in the mountain. If any of these are making love they are doing it where it is cooler or in their dreams. At sunset, which comes early in the desert, the little gophers leap like fingers into a glove into their holes that just exactly fit, and really disappear; not so much as a shining eye peers out. What they do underneath, just below the surface, I don't know, but I imagine them lying in a pattern of concentric rings, breathing softly, snoozing silently, suspended, waiting for the hot, passionate sunlight, and secure in the thought that it will not rain, not in each little lifetime at least.

How many patients, like me, have lain on as many cots on as many shaded porches with no other subject matter than the love-life of the gopher to amuse them, feeling within themselves a thin desire without content which disappears along with the tiny creature's exit and the immediate arrival of sterile nurses, sexless, squeaking in their aprons blue with starch, to wrap them in blankets smelling of disinfectant; into your hot mouth a thermometer tasting like glue, and taking with them on the round-trip back to the laboratory paper cartons and glass bottles marked with the names of the citizens of this place to search in our cold

sputum and pale urine for the sperm of death. And what sort of botanical schoolroom is that where deadly flowers grow out of test tubes nourished only by our bowels. And student gardeners wait for our cadavers that they may graduate; the thesis: I Told You The Girl In No. 4 Was Cancerous . . . I must rest. (I am afraid to say, "My hour is up.")



Besides the sex-life of the gophers the grounds of our Alma Mater are decorated, indeed the whole desert as far as I can imagine is interrupted, by a promiscuity of succulents and cacti. The plants of the desert, it seems to me, must have once long ago been submerged, they remind me so of the fantastic anemone and aquatic flora or even of the fishes, the octopus and fauna, rigid now, but even after this long dry spell not yet dehydrated, many of them storing water in their complicated insides like inanimate camels. I like to think, too, that great ocean once veiled, at least (seven seas like seven veils), what now shocks the beholder with its aggressive, immodest profusion of the countless genitalia of giants. Where have these great men gone leaving their phallus behind? (Into Parliament?) What a funny erosion is this that transports the body and deposits the members. Or are they lying under the sand like children on the beach with only their noses out?

. It is not alone my imprisoned body, tied down with sterile sheets, but still warm, that inspires sexual analogy and phallic metaphor, because out of the scanty library of this school-for-invalids there are books dumped on the foot of my bed one at a time, not to tire me, that name, not by

me, these very monster plants that feed my imagination. I did not need their authority to inspire me, I am not slow to trace the act of love in the clouds, but I will footnote it, nevertheless: *D. Puberulus*, *Dinteranthus Microspermus*, the first like a waxen water lily growing out of the buttocks of a girl, the second a twice behinded infant. The *L. Pseudotrincatella* var. *Mundtii* resembles most the budding mount (mons) of a nine year old girl and the *Argyroderma Testiculare* as if the bud had bloomed, and like its title, donating something special to the female. Less attractive, for these latter two are lovely, is the *C. Teres* looking as if a snowdrop were growing from what was left of an amputated arm. Less sensual but weirdly attractive to the senses rather than to the intellect, others look like blossoming amoebas (*Sedums*, etc.) and make-believe hand grenades (*C. Calulus*); and as if the pancakes had sprouted: the *Chemispherica*. On the other hand, the *Pachyphytum Ovi-ferum* does look like a clump of eggs, one or two of which wish to be trees. (Penis envy?) A little more dialectic is the *Lithops Lesliei* that looks like a flowering brain, a big, umbrella-shaped daisy taking its nourishment from the frontal lobes. But the obscenities of the desert, rivals in indecent exposure, are the *Euphorbia Inermis* for which I can think of a more descriptive name, *Multitudinous Penis Erectus* and the *Carnegiea Gigantea*. This latter, called simply the giant cactus (it grows to a hundred feet), is a terrifying spectacle (spectacle troublante) to a mere woman, bedridden at that; it fills one with awe and admiration, and I wonder if there were great deserts in Greece, so like its fluted columns (pilasters) this rigid *thing* looks (and it seems more likely that architecture should copy nature than nature. architecture). Or did Constantine, in memory of his own

virility, design the pilaster, crowning it with the acanthus leaf? Enough of this hypnagogic illusion . . . "Come in!"

* * *

That was my nurse to take my temperature and ask without expecting or waiting for an answer, "Whatever-is-all-that?" and, "Here-drink-this," and, "Lie-down-now." . . . Fencing everything in, making enceinte the big gray desert are the mountain ranges, as abstract, as unreal as a mirage and neither symbol nor fetish of anything, untranslatable, infinite, anonymous. The doctors have told me of hunting the mountain lion in them and have gone so far in their alibi as to have noted and described to me details: the five-cushioned prints in the pure deep snow, the bitter cold, how your tongue will stick to your gun as to the blade of your ice skate, the green eyes of the lioness, her cleverness, but I know it is an ether dream indulged in while sprawling among their nasty test tubes and the unmentionable decor of the laboratory. You might as well say, "I dined on the horizon," as, "I slept in the mountain."

As for the coyote that you never see, his bark like the staccato howl of the redskins, that makes your blood freeze and your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth, he is imaginary, too, and his bark in the cold early morning that scares you to death is the medieval monkey-shines, in truth, of the savages I just mentioned, that echoes still, and will forever, from crag to crag, an everlasting reverberation among numberless perceptive sounding-boards: the big ears of the mountain. Some tourist is always claiming to have seen a coyote. "He slinks away; I saw him look back over his shoulder at me; I was too frightened to run away," but it is a sick dog, you may be sure, dehydrated with fear of

water where there is none: the desert; feverish, doubly mad.

It is true that the desert blooms, however; that is not an ether dream, much as it resembles one, like wishful thinking. In the Spring, the succulents and cacti, that all winter could have been arrested for lascivious carriage, become whimsical, alluring, seductive; it is as if violets grew out of the plumbing, daffodils out of a fire hydrant, and like these items they, too, have stored away pure water to nourish their bloomings. Tenuous, spiraling, bright red streamers leap out of the ocotillo and fall like stars at Versailles; yellow water lilies quiver and expand while you wait from the opuntia and a Botticelli-like profusion of small, neat flora comes out of each squat and bulbous succulent as if they were emerging from their big brothers. Oh, it's lovely, it sings! But something is lacking; I am not fooled by the faint odor of orange blossoms provided sympathetically from California and Phoenix by the prevailing breezes. There is no perfume; and where there is no perfume there is no flower. These blooms are cheats: The eye is satisfied; the spirit frustrated. This blooming of the desert is false poetry: poetry with a motive. It is the male poet writing dithyrambs on foolscap, his object: seduction. All winter he has stored his purple ink and now in prolificacy, with trembling hand, he transcribes his desperate serum.



I do not know the date, I am not sure even of the year; I am not going anywhere . . . I did not have my walk. Two and a half years is a long time to wait for a three minute walk, and that walk which I had imagined and looked forward to so long is finished but I didn't take it. They promise

me, "Soon," but I sneer in my heart at the promises of doctors and the simple-minded, simpering agreement with everything you say, by the nurses. No wonder I had a fever, higher than it has been for weeks: I was happy. I planned my wardrobe carefully, the red silk blouse with stars in it, the pale yellow shorts, espadrilles (it is so hot), my mauve lipstick that makes me look as if I were sitting under a tree. All day I waited; I could not read or write or rest. I did not eat my lunch. The nurse helped me dress; I trembled with excitement, and then comes an interne, not even a doctor, just an interne, not dry behind the ears, as they say.

"Is she running any fever?"

"Scarcely any."

"What is it?"

"I have not taken it yet, I thought . . ."

"You thought! Take it now," he interrupted.

The thermometer felt like ice against my tongue . . . 101 . . . I knew I could not go. My lip trembled.

"You'll appreciate it ever more when you can go," he said, "it's of no interest, that walk, anyway."

I controlled myself in his presence but the minute he was out the door my heart beat violently; the blood rushed into my face; the blood in my gums started a toothache. "*God damn the son of a bitch!*" I cried out in an uncontrollable fury; then I sobbed, "He promised! He promised!"

"Yes," said the nurse.

"*You* agree," I said, my spirit returning, "that he is a son of a bitch?" It gave me pleasure to see her squirm. She started picking up my things. "Do you agree?" I said, raising my voice.

"Yes, yes," she said, "do be calm."

I started to cry again, touched by a slight tone of sympathy I had not expected, in her voice. How weak I am; how disgustingly weak; my hands shake as I obediently drink the glass of half-milk, half-cream that I am pestered to take three times a day, but I gag which makes me angry again, "The son of a *bitch*!" I say, shaking my head and trying to swallow, "The rat!" and I finish it, reaching out the glass to her, "Here."

She is already smoothing the sheet over me; I try to look at her but she swims in my eyes.

"There now, promise me you will rest until supper; ring if you," she hesitated, "need anything."

I knew what she meant: three short rings if you hemorrhage.

"There is no future," I said, summing up, I suppose, everything.



This morning after breakfast I hear a thumping noise around the door to my room and the nurse slides in as if she had a Christmas present for me in the hall that I must not see.

"Come," she says, "just as you are; we are going to the gate." She says it quietly in an ordinary voice not to excite me.

"We are?" I do not complain, or insist on dressing; she finds my slippers; leads me to the door.

"No, no! Not a wheel chair!"

"Oh, come; before the sun is hot, here is your hat," and she hands me my pink straw shade hat.

"Oh no, no! Not a hat!"

"Yes, you know the doctor does not want the sun on you."

"That rat," I say mildly, and so I go, really eager, but dropping my chin on my breast like a sulky child. The sharp clear whistle of a cardinal makes me look up.

"Where is he?"

"Right there in the bush, look."

How beautiful he is, scarlet on the bright green ocotillo.

"Where is she?" I see her darting flight, and up, landing in a three point stall, the slight thorny branch dips with her weight; I hear her modest answer; he waits for her, whistling again, quivering, tremulous. My heart beats fast in my neck from happiness, I want to laugh.

"Nurse," I said, turning my head back, "you called the interne a son of a bitch."

"Shhh . . ."

The breeze of walking me lifted her curls, her cheeks were flushed; she giggled.

"Good morning, doctor."

There he is. How nice and friendly he looks, his stethoscope swinging jauntily against his thigh, his short, white jacket so spotless, a polka dotted bow tie under his Adam's apple. "Hello," and he steps aside, off the narrow path, to let us pass "good for you."

"Isn't it wonderful!" I say and he answers seriously, "It is that."

I know well what is the matter with me, it is called a sense of well-being, and is sometimes confused with happiness which it is not. It never lasts long and now that I have learned to anticipate it and be suspicious of it, it scarcely outlives its own sequence.

"They are following you," says the nurse and it is true, the two cardinals are scooping along from bush to bush on either side of me. The sun is turning pinker the palms of my

hands which I have opened to feel it a little, so covered up I am everywhere else. A tiny relative breeze fans my cheeks and tickles my ears. A soft and sentimental cooing begins and the doves line up on the wires overhead, they are the color of pink nougat; the sky is chinchilla blue; I breathe in like the beginning of a sigh.

"Are you getting tired?"

"How beautiful," I say.

Our walk, in a series of tacks, is noiseless along the narrow cement walks of the institution. We pass closely by the porches of other patients now and they look at me with interest and with envy. I am up! Better, no doubt. Cured? Going home? Or just to be x-rayed? Some are too ill or too languid to raise their heads, some, the men, tease the nurse as we go by. (Oh, Nurse!) A young man lying flat turns his head and smiles at us; his hair is like wet leaves; the beautiful scarlet flush on his cheekbones, the brilliant light in his dark eyes startles me, used as I am to illness here, but I say, "Nurse, please stop." We do, and it is like hurrying through a gallery because you have an appointment when a little bright canvas stops you in your tracks. (Ahh!)

"Good morning, Dick," says my nurse.

"Good morning, Nurse . . . your patient has . . . gold eyes, I . . ."

"Don't talk, Dick; this is Noel."

"Noel, that's very pretty . . . Nurse . . ."

"Please, Dick."

"Isn't it wonderful!" said Dick.

We go along toward the big gate. I am very quiet, thinking of Dick; he is going to die, that I know, and his, "Isn't it wonderful!" frightens me. That sense of well-being (Euphoria), how deceptive and dangerous it is! It has noth-

ing to do with health . . . Mother Nature with her ample breasts indulges one nursling at the expense of the other And then fondling the sick one looks him straight in the eye and lies to him.

"I should not have taken you there, you are depressed.

"Thank God."

"What?"

"Thank God I said."

If I saw the big shining road I have forgotten it, or did not look; on the way back I noticed the male cardinal hiding in the bush like the last ornament on a Christmas tree. The nurse puts me back in my smooth cool bed and cranks it down, which makes me feel dizzy: my legs tremble with fatigue.

"Don't worry so, he's going to be all right," said my nurse.

Does she think I am a fool? Anger reaches down into my very insides and clenches its fist.



And so began my alfresco existence.

* * *

We live in courts; the rooms form a square, in the middle a patio and on the outside of each room, away from the patio, is each patient's sleeping porch, but we only use these shaded porches overlooking the desert in the day time, it is too cold at night. I am allowed now to push myself in the wheel chair, walk five minutes a day and even call on the other patients. Across the patio is the man who has little fishes. Sitting up in bed, his face flushed, his eyes follow their erratic movements; the three sides of his room are

lined with glass tanks and tiny, transparent fish, the biggest an inch long with green and black, swirling wet taffeta tails entertain him, at least keep his mind off his sorry troubles.

"I go to sleep, if you want to call it sleep, how my God-damn legs ache, at night and in the morning there are two thousand one hundred and sixty-seven more! And I cannot get my wife with one! . . . Look!"

Two gophers, then three, four, six are at it. We watch. What has this to do with us? We are as far removed as the mountain, as innocent, as continent. On the outside of this man's door, a former successful businessman, Clubs: Racquet, River, Harvard, St. James Golf, is a small sign:

HENDRICKS, JOHN
Bathroom Privileges

"Noel!"

"Yes! Good-by John, see you later."

"So long, Noel."

I step out of one door into the next; and in this room lies the tortured arthritic. This old lady lies literally on a bed of pain; she is strapped down; her legs stick through the slats of her cot and great weights attached to pulleys are stretching her out, pulling at her sinews.

"How *well* you look, dear."

I keep myself from retorting, "I feel *awful*," because I will not compete with this poor soul in physical torment, her only superiority the severe pain of which we are all aware, although some of the patients' sympathy is diluted with a kind of envy which they do not recognize as such. It is simpler when you understand that in this community of the sick, the sickest is quite naturally — well quite naturally—the sickest. She or he has definitely a precedence, and so this old lady, her bony oversized ankles, naked and

deeply tanned from the sun treatments, looking like a farmer's joints, is the aristocrat of this asylum, a Mrs. Vanderbilt at the opera. And I assure you, when she greets me, lorgnetted or not, with, "My dear, how *well* you look," it is meant to put me in my place. Her face is discolored, navy blue under the eyes, to the cheekbones, from lack of sleep; but her small, blue eyes, the small, blue eyes all old people have, are bright with a surface brightness, a little hard. Her mouth is twisted, prepared for pain, her teeth on edge.

"Dear, fetch me . . . , " she had to turn her head to find something for me to fetch; I tried to help her.

"Your pills? A glass of Vichy?"

"No, no, it is ten minutes to my B Complex and Dr. Paul does not, and you know that, allow me to drink carbonated water of any kind, it gripes me, dear, you know that perfectly well, it is not possible to stand any more pain. Fetch me, dear, my fan. Thank you, dear. How *pretty* your legs are, what fine ankles! "

(This was carrying things a little far I thought, her own poor ankles like triple-varnished square knots on the deck of a schooner.)

"I must go, Mrs. Tibbitts," I said, feeling extremely irritated at this puerile exhibitionism, "I do hope you will sleep tonight."

"I shan't," she said, her eyes sparkling.

"I'm sure you won't," I replied.

The swinging, screened door opened and our female doctor came in, making rounds. She is the only doctor in the sanitarium who is completely tactless; she is an excellent doctor but very bad for the patients.

"Good morning, Mrs. Tibbitts, you look much better."

The old lady looked startled; again I tried to help.

"She is in severe pain," I said, "I assure you she did not sleep at all last night, in spite of the sedation; I know, doctor, because I saw her light at two and again . . ."

Dr. Mary moved impatiently. "I have had no sleep for a full week," she said, "if you want to know what no sleep is, become a resident doctor in an institution like this; and I feel perfectly well, perfectly well; the importance of sleep is much exaggerated. Can you give me another specimen, Mrs. Tibbitts?"

The old lady's face during this stupid and unnecessarily candid speech was brick red; she fanned herself faster and faster with the tiny, hand-painted fan; her wispy hair flipped back and forth on her high bald forehead; she pursed up her mouth and made a chewing motion with her jaws, but she could not speak with fury. Soon it broke, but into an impotent, childish sobbing.

"I am the sickest!"

"By all means," said Dr. Mary. "But stop that silly crying; I assure you I know you are sick but we are doing the best we can for you. Do you think you could give the nurse, here, a specimen, now, or shall I come back later when you are calmer?"

With the quick brain of the sleepless, the sufferer (pain does sharpen the wits), the old lady, immediately calming down, said, "It is impossible."

Dr. Mary looked worried. The little old lady began to bloom.

"You have difficulty in voiding?" asked the doctor, very interested.

"Difficulty!" snorted the patient, "I promise you I have not made water for eight days come Monday." She counted

on her gnarled and bruised fingers. "That's right, eight days come Monday."

Complete mistress now of her salon we left her; I could almost hear her say, "James, show these ladies out." I saw her head nodding, her lips moving, telling herself a little story, and I was glad she thought she had won, poor thing. But I looked at Dr. Mary and saw that the dark blue shadow, as if painted on with a wide brush, was, in truth, as deep under her eyes as the old lady's, and a terrible weariness and impatience marked her.

"Noel," she said irritably, "you are not well yet."



It is so hot, but I do not perspire, and cool water on my skin evaporates like spilled water on a stove or rain on a hot copper roof. It is part of my particular illness, I am told, and all the tubercular patients complain of the same thing. The arthritics get a break, then, cooling themselves off with a god-given mechanism, taken so much for granted by the healthy. I do not mean the arthritics are healthy or to be envied, theirs is the pain, the crippling shame of the eventuality of one day creeping on all fours like an animal; "the dignity of man is his upright stature," they must say to themselves. Walking around with one lung is not comparable in humiliation to that, is it? It is hidden except to the x-ray; who knows? "Let's walk a little slower," is all you have to say. But have you ever seen a healthy woman stealthily withdraw her children, no matter how safe the ~~case~~, from the tuberculous? A strong man turn his cheek to your kiss? Long after you are cured won't you have the feeling that the guests back up against the wall as you come in, and lovers pity but do not kiss you? Oh well, there is not much choice, perhaps, but I say here in private

for none to hear, I would rather be wrapped up in a ball like the tail of a boiled-alive lobster than be unmissable.

I *will* not enter, however, into the competitive argument of the sick as to who is the sicker; how pitiful a debate, what a sorry dialectic, what a miserable intellectual exercise, but what other event is current Here? And our only sport is this unhealthy competition, but competition, nevertheless; you are merely the spectators. Can't you cheer, for God's sake? Here, I spell it with a capital "H" purposely, we are not like you, There. Our past is "When I was well," our future, "When I will be well," but our present is such as it is.

Last night, yesterday evening, before the chill of night, there was a party for the patients, an innocent party, an entertainment no one has particularly looked forward to, except those poor invalids who will not be allowed to come, or those on that tremulous border who may come, "*if*." The rest of us are geared too high, too hysterical, in a sense, to be amused by a kind of censored buffet sterile that won't upset us, give us a fever, plunge us into despair or wild laughter which is the normality, as it were, of the sick, making them hard to please. It is like a taste for brilliant colors and highly seasoned food, the dizziness and diarrhea part of the sensation, the fun.

"Will Dick be there?" I asked my nurse.

"I'm afraid not," she answered.

The cots of the bed-rest patients are wheeled to the affair, others are in chairs; I am allowed to walk. There was a quartet, a magician, a coloratura soprano. I don't think anyone had a very good time; there was milk and cookies served right through the performance; doctors and nurses stood around relaxed, teasing and kidding.

"Isn't that Dick?" I said to my nurse.

"Yes, he must have begged to come."

The coloratura, a pretty, dark girl with the big, one-piece bust of the singer, out of all proportion to her slender girdled hips, began to sing, at least exercise her voice, as they do. Everyone was well behaved and quiet, so quiet that when Dick suddenly spoke it could be heard all over the court.

It was a bitter rhetorical question, "Will she kiss me good-night?"

The terrible silence, the intimate, awful sympathy and understanding of every tubercular patient throbbled in that two seconds like a big heart. But Dick, isolated in his fearful illness, could not have felt it. As the singer stood, blushing stupidly, thinking, no doubt, that she had been whistled at, prettily flustered, Dick began to laugh hysterically; but weak as he was it did not last long and in a moment the entertainment went on, the doctors, in their wisdom, doing nothing. Dick lay with closed eyes, big tears on his lashes.

There was no other interruption except a little dog. In the midst of a number he came wandering between the cacti and succulents, nose down, on the trail of a gopher. He was a small, black cocker and I joyously seized him. I held him in my arms for the rest of the entertainment feeling comforted by his little warm presence. All of us identified ourselves with Dick, all of us felt the chill of evening in the desert. Then I started back, still carrying him; the doctors patted his head.

"May I take him to my room?" I asked.

Picking her way through the cactus in her white shoes, her face all screwed up in perturbation came the head nurse.

"You should *know* better," she panted, as she gingerly

picked the spaniel from my arms and handed him, drooping, his pink tongue lolling, his big eyes turned up foolishly, to a little nurse's aid. "Bathe him!" she said. "Use lysol." And turning to me, "You should think of *others*. *Healthy* people will pet this dog!"

I walked along the path to my room (home!) head down; my feelings all used up. I came too near the cholla (jumping cactus) and it moved suddenly toward me; two of its flat thick leaves like green, damp palms covered with prehensile, rigid tentacles wrapped themselves around my arm just above the elbow; I was frightened at this unholy affection, this sticky embrace.

"Oh, help!" I called out, and tearing myself away, I ran home laughing and crying. "Unhand me! Help! Rape!" and I kept it up until I got to my room.

"Be quiet, you woke me up," one of the patients called out petulantly.

I calmed down and took off my sweater and my shorts; my whole arm, my fingers, and part of my thigh were punctured with the painful quills, the nasty fingernails of the cactus that had attacked me. I looked like a sick porcupine.

Dr. Paul came and sat on my bed. I lay naked on my side, my head in my hand, and looked at him; I am quite used to stripping for the profession; if I have only a sore throat, I strip from habit. Silently he went to work with tweezers and Witch Hazel and one by one he drew the things out of me as if I were a pincushion. It was not unpleasant and I did not take my eyes off him; I stared at his pale, blond head and watched his long hands at work. As he pulled each thistle he raised his eyes to my face, watching for signs of pain, ready to comfort me, I imagine, but I met his eyes smiling. These painful caresses, this deep

concentration on me, my body, from the tall, thin doctor, his long legs hanging over the side of my bed, gave me intense pleasure. Does he suspect it? He raises his eyes to me and lets them wait there a minute, looking deeply into mine.

"I think that's enough for now," he said, and he tossed my sweater over the middle of me; one sleeve went down the inside of my thigh, the other just missed the pink nipple on my right breast. "You look like a collage by Bracque," he said, standing up, his hand on the doorknob.

Without any warning I cry out, "Stay, please stay, oh, do stay a little while."

I sit up stark naked again, my breasts trembling from the exertion, and catch his sleeve, put it to my cheek; I can feel that one of the three small buttons on the cuff of his white jacket is missing. Without thinking I pull him toward me until he is almost between my bare legs; I pull his wrist down and hold his arm close between my breasts, how long it is, it divides me in two. I do all this before I realize what I am doing. I want terribly to be in his arms, feel the warmth of his body, the pressure of his bones. I want to be surrounded. I want darkness; I want oblivion: Right now!

But he resisted; he is startled by my sudden embrace without any warning; his sky-blue eyes with the dark blue shadows over and beneath them look like the eyes of something trapped and in pain; and I come to myself quickly: hardly a minute has passed.

• "Please, hand me my pyjamas," I say, feeling the return of modesty I thought I had lost forever. "Please!"

"Don't be upset," he said, "don't worry; here you are, I'll help."

He drew the silk trousers over my feet and up my legs

as neatly as a woman and tied them around my waist. (Flip!) He put on my jacket, and as both of us searched for the sleeve that can never be found he laughed and said, "I ought to do better than that."

My eyes were downcast, but I felt as if my two breasts were looking at him, even moving up and toward him, lovingly.

He finished and gave me a slight shove. "Hop into bed." He drew the sheet over me, tucked me in, and then he bent down from his great height, up there, and bracing himself with one hand resting on either side my body, he dropped his head, and looking at me for a second, his face so close that his eyes seemed like one enormous shimmering blue one, kissed me on my lips and straightened up, his cheeks flushed.

"I kissed you goodnight," he said and I thought he seemed angry.

The kiss was too sudden and I was so unprepared I did not feel it any deeper than the edges of my mouth. My lips were wet and cool and all I could think of, my brief passion for him gone, was the bitter remark, "Aren't you afraid? I am tubercular."

"I am a Jew," he said.

"Well, goodnight."

"Goodnight."

* * *

I lay awake nearly all night; for a little while the moon lit up the walks and the roofs and darkened the great cacti, left shadows like black aprons beside the squatting succulents that stealthily hide from her light as she moves.

blossoming in the dark. I can see all this from my bed; I watch a doctor cross to another court; a nurse hurry at an angle to him going somewhere else; it is a little like a ballet but there is no music, only the sporadic, harsh coughing of the audience which is no doubt bored and uneasy, maybe embarrassed. How long is it that I have lain awake listening to this medley of coughs; two years? Three? How sleepless I am. At about this time now, it is 2.30, the old man (only an aged male can cough like that, over and over, higher and higher, and then near strangulation) will begin; I wait fearfully to hear him catch his breath; he is like a baby that holds on until he is blue in the face, just to tease its mother Ah, there he goes; the nurse will bring codein.

The moon disappears behind a mountain as suddenly as she came up over one, her circuit so short at this longitude, at this time of year; it is almost a perpendicular hairpin turn she describes as if, behind the mountain some one had set off a rocket. (Lovers could hold a kiss as long as that.) Now it is pitch black, as black as the inside of an umbrella; it will be lighter behind my closed lids than this and so I close them for comfort, and sure enough, it is lighter; there is a pinkish glow that seems slowly to rise and set, almost to breathe, to inhale and exhale; it is expanding now like a big, pink oleander.

Shall I ring for sedation? My teeth involuntarily bite hard at nothing; I sleep.

* * *

Cold hands clutch at me and I struggle; oh, how I struggle! I am desperate. I must get away! "Oh, I beg of you!" My

lungs are inflated to bursting; I am drowning and I fight to reach the surface of the water; a cold fear lodges in the very center of my back. I *must* get away from it, it is like an icy fist boring into my spine. "Dominick! I am drowning! . . . Sun Beau is loose! Frieda! Frieda! What is behind me! Frieda!" I wake exhausted from two dreams in one, the sharp, white surface pain of fear searing my whole body. I have had a terrific struggle to awaken but there is no sign of any physical disrepose: the sheet is smooth, its bluish surface undented or creased, the side light of dawn coming in my windows makes no shadows. I recall the Laocoönian pose I felt myself to have been in, my head thrown back, my spine arched like a sprung bow, to escape the chill in the center of my back but I was lying straight and still. No one came running, I had not called out. But I am soaking wet; I am lying in a puddle, almost, of sweat; my hair is sticking to my cheeks, my forehead; the water is running in little rivulets from my sides. My teeth start jumping up and down as I shake with cold, the horrid, wet, penetrating cold of a typical nocturnal sweat. The arm that reaches up for the bell is draped in a sticky, wet sleeve and the night air of the desert makes me feel as if I were plunging it into a bucket of ice water.

"Nurse, I am so cold."

"Yesterday you were too hot."

We both giggle; "I'm never satisfied," I said through chattering teeth as she rubbed me hard with heated towels that she had brought with her.

There is a pattern to one's needs and what one will ask for at what time in a sanitarium. At a certain hour the patient in No. 6 will ring for a sleeping pill, another for a soda mint; No. 7 wants a blanket. 12, nothing, just to talk,

and an old woman in 13 is petrified at the yelping of the "coyotes." The events of the evening come slowly back to my consciousness.

"Nurse, who is Dr. Paul?"

"He's a darling," she answered.

"Yes, I know . . ."

"I should not tell you, but he is tubercular; poor thing, he cannot work in any climate but this; and now, with one lung collapsed . . . well, are you all right now, No. 7 will be wanting a blanket."

"Yes, I am all right, I am quite all right;" my lip curls and anger grips me hard: no wonder he was not afraid to kiss me! No wonder, no wonder! My tears comfort me; I do not struggle; I give up.



It was not until the middle of the afternoon of the next day when I was supposedly resting that I remembered the doctor's answer to my "I am tubercular." "I am a Jew," he had said, so quietly that I had not really heard it, perhaps, or, more likely, intent on my own statement and expecting an entirely different answer, a comforting cliché of some sort, at most, it had not registered. And then the wonder of being kissed had been spoiled by the nurse's telling me that he, too, was sick. My anger has passed but disappointment clings to me; hadn't I seen, with no time to speak of it even to myself, at the end of a long corridor in my mind, as it were, love, perhaps, a frail beginning of something to pin my heart on? He had dared to kiss me; hadn't he, then, been anaesthetized a little by love, some sort of emotion? And even if he did not love me, wouldn't I love the one who found me desirable, lovable? It had

come so close on the scrubbed puppy incident. Again as I write I am neglecting the answer he gave me: "I am a Jew." My long illness has taken away my insight, the ability, that like a dancer or a trapeze artist, is like perfect balance, or in a singer, perfect pitch, the ability to identify yourself with others: people, dogs, angels, saints, murderers, the bank clerk whose hands outwit him, the hobo, the Jew. Sickness and pain wrap one up in oneself, in one's own sorrowful skin; one life, one small world holds your attention; you hear only your own voice lamenting that you have been chosen. When you get better . . . and I must be better, because for a split second I am Dr. Paul, the Jew, and I cry out (to myself) bitterly, "You have been kissed by a Jew! Aren't you afraid of being contaminated!" . . . But how quietly he had said it: "I am a Jew." He has been a Jew a long time. What a gentle reprimand I had received from a sufferer who might well lament: "Why have I been chosen!" This had nothing to do with competition: "I am the sickest;" his own illness was no more than an inconvenience to him, a slight indisposition, indeed, compared to the stigma. But as I return into my own skin having visited for a second in his, for a moment I am neither one nor the other, neither tuberculous nor Jewish, and I remember the nurse's answering, when I asked, "Who is Dr. Paul?", not: "I should tell you *he is a Jew*," but: "I should not tell you, he is tubercular." And I, I did not even hear what he said. Is Jewry a sickness (the Hebrew an invalid), then, incurable, that its patients cannot forget, their pain, are preoccupied like the inmates of this sanatorium with their own blood, their distorted features (Ah, my crippled nose)? Poor darling, you are the sickest! But I am not afraid . . .

As I was writing I looked up and saw a girl coming down the path, bare-headed, bafe-legged; she wore a short, flat skirt that looked like the swinging door of a pub; she was almost black from the sun. It is a good thing most of the patients are resting and do not see her long bounding stride, her shiny white teeth, her disgusting health; how furious they would be at her arrogance, how dare she come here! Then I hear her on the porch next to mine. She is laughing.

"Do the doctors here always strip you completely naked?" she said, "and the *questions* they asked: 'Have you always had inverted nipples!'" Her laughter, sweet and musical, made its way around the patio as if it knocked on each door. But a little later I heard her sobbing, "They say I can't play *tennis*."



Poor John Hendricks, he called to me as I had my hand on Mrs. Tibbitts' door.

"Noel!"

"Yes."

"Look, I've been demoted," and he nodded toward his own door; the little sign now read simply: JOHN HENDRICKS.

"See you later," I said, and went in to Mrs. Tibbitts who had called me.

"Jesus Christ, where is my B Complex?"

As I found it and administered it, the moaning from the room on the other side of her from John's became high and almost hysterical. We were all nearly used, but not quite, to Aziere's feverish weaknesses.

"She is terrible," said Mrs. Tibbitts. "She has no self control."

"But she has an almost continuous fever of 104," I said, shocked by the old lady's unsympathetic complaint.

"Numbers!" snorted Mrs. Tibbitts. "She has no *pain*."

I almost slammed her door as I went in to Aziere who had called, "Noel, please, please, come."

"Did you hear that *laughter*," she began, "who is that visitor, what is the *matter* with her?"

"She is not a visitor, she is ill, too," I said, referring, as she had, to the sunburned girl.

"Not really," said Aziere, "or she would not laugh; she must be *crazy*."

Aziere, I know, because I have heard the doctors discussing her in the patio, is very and mysteriously ill. It seems she has both arthritis of the spine and tuberculosis of the bone but they don't really know. For six months, incredible as it seems, she has daily registered a fever of 104. She looks like a lovely, bruised gardenia but her spirit lingers on; she cannot bear to be ill, does not enjoy it in the sense that Mrs. Tibbitts, ill as she is, does seem to. This girl lies in bed depressed, angry, hysterical; without pride. "I am going to die and I have had no fun." I stand at the foot of her bed looking at her beautiful dark hair, her enormous dark eyes, the color of ripe olives, her smooth skin which in spite of her fever is strangely white and moist like a gardenia, her throat as fresh as if it had just been peeled, like a willow branch. Her feet are uncovered and are as white and smooth, as appealing, as her round neck; the nurse has tinted her toenails a raspberry pink. Her room is full of toys like a child's: a big teddy bear, a black velvet horse with a braided, white wool mane. On her bedside table are perfumes, bath oils and blue soap, note paper, puzzles, Mickey Mouse. (They will burn them all, I think.)

"No one has been to see me, there isn't any mail, nobody *calls*," she said.

"Don't sit on my *bed*!" she cried out as Dr. Paul and an interne came in; she wept all through their call, shivered and shrunk away from the cold stethoscope, wouldn't let them examine her throat, screamed when Dr. Paul touched her ankles. As soon as they had gone she said, "I can't stand it when doctors sit on my bed; I can't help it. I imagine those things. That's all I can think of, those *genitals* on my bed. They look like *chicken* livers from the butchers. *I can't help it.*"



Toward morning I woke to what I thought was the everlasting redskins in the mountains, my heart beat fast, but it was next door in the new patient's room, the sunburned girl's. The early morning in the desert was so still that between the screaming and wild laughter, I could hear the other patients' bells ringing up in the office, calling for help. The hysterics of a fellow patient in the cold dawn when one's own blood is cool, one's resistance low, is very terrifying; a kind of fear without content stifles you. I heard the male voice of one of the doctors trying to soothe her and after a while she quieted down; there was silence, but the silence was pregnant, fearsome, too. I did not ring but a terrible loneliness crept over me.

Pretty soon I heard her door open and two doctors stood outside my door and discussed the case. I have heard my friends dissected like this at all hours of the day and night and I have blushed for them as the doctors handled verbally their bodies inside and out as they have no doubt blushed for me.

"It's all right now," I heard Dr. Philo say, "I've got her exactly where I want her: she'll give no more trouble." He went on to say, "I scared Hell out of her, I had to; finally I said, 'Look here, do you know you are dying?' I said, 'There's very little hope for you.' Boy, she quieted down. She threw her arms around my neck and I knew she was licked. She'll be no trouble now."

They went on and out of the patio. I smelled tobacco, and there was no sound from the sunburned girl's room. The usual coughing among the patients did not begin: something held the attention of the audience and the poor little star lay like L'Aiglon, somewhere beneath the sunburn the pallor of death, and in her poor little soul a bogeyman fear. Too frightened to call out, she will behave now; it's called "cooperating."



Besides the sunburned girl who can't play tennis anymore, the girl with the inverted nipples, there is another new patient. These new patients interest us all as if we were at school and a new boy, a new girl, arrives in the middle of a semester. The ambulatory ones are messengers, like me, providing the bedridden with the protein of gossip. Whether for his (the new patient's) morale or mine Dr. Paul has asked me to go and see him, be friendly, cheer him up. I know that he rowed on the crew at Harvard, that his mother is a problem, that he will not "accept" his illness, that he is going to tax the energies and patience of the entire, sanitarium. He has plenty of money which will be useless to him here, his self-indulgence on which there was no curb, and is no curb, will make him a waste of time for the doctors. He is an arthritic of the infectious type which

I understand under the tutelage of midnight meetings outside my door is curable if the patient is willing. Kelly is unwilling. He is fast becoming a cripple, his chin slowly dropping to his breast, the weight of his head gradually unable to resist the pull of gravity will describe a curve, his spine thickening and hardening, until like a degenerate old tree in the forest he will no more give in the breeze that it does; a hoop of a man he will look at the sky from beneath, between his legs he will converse with his friends, in bitterness curse his fate, which was not so much fate as choice. That is hardly me thinking or speaking, it is what I gather, but if I am prejudiced it is in his favor, I feel a distinct anger against these story tellers who, given a patient's history, present him with a finale, bury him before he is dead; who cannot see that there is a possible choice between happiness and longevity. This young man whom I am going to see has made that choice and I am on his side.

I found him lying flat on a thin mattress with a plywood board under it. His room was full of suitcases and a big wardrobe trunk; Lautrec's colored lithograph of a horse and rider (rear view) was already on the wall; beside his bed the same old cartons we all have that look like ice cream cartons but aren't. He cannot, at least not easily, turn his head so he speaks to me without taking his eyes off the ceiling.

Thinking I am a doctor or a nurse he says, "Come in, what can I do for you?" in a loud, cheerful voice.

• "I've come to call, I'm Noel," I said, and then, "Oh, please don't bother," as it took him full five minutes to get into a position to see me.

"Oh, Hell," he said; in his struggle he had got himself badly twisted in his pyjamas; the pink silk top was spread

open so that I could see his frail chest, a line of gold hairs dividing it as if a bird had walked down him, and the trousers tied on but not closed showed his flat stomach and part of himself. "Goddamn it! A pretty sight for a girl!" he said.

I did not know whether to pretend I didn't see anything or help him.

"Will you please?" he said, "I can't stand letting that buck-toothed nurse handle me."

I tucked the top into the bottom of the pyjamas and as he managed to raise himself an eighth of an inch off the bed I deftly, if I do say so, flipped the pants around where they belonged and retied them snugly.

"What difference does it make," is all I could think of to say and my hair fell over my eyes helping me out.

Kelly looked at me eagerly and I felt with pleasure, and accepted it quickly, his male admiration, his quick desire for me, but with it a kind of surprised look as if he didn't believe it.

"Is there something the matter with you, why are you here in this pest-house?" he said.

"I'm sick, but I'm better, I've been here three years."

"Jesus Christ on a mountain," he said and I saw a frightened look come over his face and I knew he thought, "Me, too, three years!"

"Why don't you get out," he said, "I'm not staying, I've got Philo to promise me next weekend in New York. Do you want to come?"

"What fun," I said, "I'd love to."

"I'm not always like this," he said, "sometimes I can walk: you're awfully pretty: Christ, how do you stand it here."

"There's something beautiful about it," I said, "really"

"I'll be Goddamned if I can see it."

"Wait until this evening and get them to let you out on a deck chair."

"Deck chair, Hell, my back, I have to *sleep* on this board, even," he interrupted.

"Then they'll push your bed out; the sunset lasts 'til midnight; it gets more and more beautiful and the mountains get darker and darker until the sky is pitch black finally and then you can see them better, I don't know why, a funny silver light comes up behind them as if . . ."

"Will you sit out with me?" he interrupted again.

"Of course, I'm always out there, with about ten blankets, it gets awfully cold. I'm allowed to go up to dinner now but I don't like it up there, I'm afraid of the people, I have my supper outside there in the patio."

"Will you have dinner here with me in my room?"

"If they will let me," I said, "I think they will."

He didn't speak but closed his eyes; I saw pain slide over his face like a sleight of hand changing even the features; I saw his fists close over the sheet and his jaw set itself. Again I did not know what to do because this, too, was nakedness and I did not want to shame him so I stood still, waiting.

Without opening his eyes he said, "Hold my hand."

I quickly slid my warm hand into his which was very cold, but I could not give him what he wanted; he pushed my hand away.

"No, you don't want to hold my hand, please go now."

"I did want to," I said.

"Fix it up about dinner," he said, his eyes still closed.
"We'll have a martini."



Dr. Paul comes in to see me late at night and I encourage my insomnia; at least, looking forward to his visit makes lying awake with an object much better than just plain lying awake. The first time, I called to him as he crossed the court but now I lie still and watch him making his late calls until finally he takes the turn toward my patio knowing it is I that he will see. As he makes the turn I know that I am in his thoughts, I alone. We seldom talk; he divests himself of his stethoscope and sits down on the one chair beside my bed. I lower my lids and I feel him watching my profile or I look into his ultramarine eyes until hypnotized, it appears, by space almost as if one were standing in a clear pool that reflected the sky, surrounded by his eyes like the ether, with this lethal dose, as it were, I go to sleep. Sometimes I put out my hand and he takes it in his; at first it just lay there as if he were thinking of something else. Then came the night that he raised it to his lips, then one early morning he pressed the end of each finger and I in turn let my hand creep up his until his slowly embraced it, and so the two hands made love more and more passionately. Like two bodies they warmed each other, took turns in taking the initiative, trembled in each other's embrace at sudden noises, clung together in stormy weather, climbed up and down each other or lay suspended, neither touching the other until the suspense, really suspense, became so tenuous that one or the other could wait no longer, and felicity was quick. Sometimes the palms cling so close that the skin melts and the warm flesh is merged, then the fingers bend over and modestly cover the pair until they

are clothed again and the moist palms separate, only the cushioned tips of the fingers cling together, rising and falling on each other. Sometimes the hands seek pleasure back to back but a frustration takes place and at the same moment they turn and kiss, shyly, as if apologizing to each other for forbidden, offside desires.

As I lay picturing the love life of two severed (almost) hands, tutored by the remote control of the feelings of two bodies vicariously encouraging their love making, he came in.

"Noel, I did not mean . . . I told you to cheer Kelly up, I did not suggest that you sleep with him."

For a second I had no notion of what he was talking about, then a series of mental cross-country hops rather than the sensible but slower main highway brought me to a signpost: JEALOUS. But intuitive as I am, I must have found only the signpost I subconsciously was looking for, the signpost around the next bend went like this: Kelly's mother complained to the doctors about my association with him; in her own words; "I don't care what anybody says to the contrary and notwithstanding, I do not believe there is any such thing as a safe case of tuberculosis and if she is cured why is she here? She certainly should not be in this court where my son is, she is a menace and I have heard her coughing in her room. I will withdraw Kelly at once if she is not moved to another patio. I am paying to have my son cured of his terrible illness and I expect you to cure him, not expose him unnecessarily."

• Dr. Paul stopped; I had felt myself flush and tears came into my eyes.

"She is a bitch," he said, "and she can take it or leave it. The morale in this patio is excellent, and the credit is

yours, why do you suppose we move some of our sickest patients in here?"

The kindly compliment meant nothing to me, I only felt like an unjustly accused child. I was sorry for Kelly, if I should sleep with him I would be innocent, as it would give me no pleasure, like a female Saint Antoine I would lie on his prostrate body and kiss his twisted mouth, my only happiness an excess of saintliness; even Kelly knew, and had not wished to accept, my pity; had pushed away my hand.

"Slept with him?" I said to Paul.

Paul smiled. "The woman was excited," he said, "she said Kelly admitted . . ."

I leapt off my bed and with only a brassiere and pyjama pants on me burst into Kelly's room, Paul close behind me, laughing at me.

"Kelly Vanderbilt, what did you tell your mother?"

He was lying flat, as usual, but he turned his head and looked at us both. He grinned broadly

"I told her I slept with you," he said, "she makes me so mad, it served her right."

"Served *her* right?" I said.

"But you *will* sleep with me, won't you?" said Kelly very sweetly. "Hi Paul, my boy, I suppose my mother has been raising Hell as usual, Christ, what a female, don't move Noel away, I love her. Come in and have a martini with us at six."

"Have fun, you two," said Dr. Paul.

"I want to meet Virus X," said Kelly.

I knew he meant, although I had not known her name, real or as Virus X, the woman on the crutch. I often see her in the court almost flying along, so graceful, on her

single crutch but I have not asked about her, thinking she might be an imaginary figure, almost. But aside from her fairy-like gait she looks as if she had just stepped out of Elizabeth Arden's and dressed for luncheon at the Passy and the matinee, only she has three legs instead of two, with the exception that the third foot does not wear a high-heeled, open-toed pump. Kelly, who has not even had time to unpack, knows more about the patients than I who have been here so long.

"She and Philo," he said, "are 'like that' but she isn't satisfied with one man at a time." Kelly, lying on his crippled back, his young face blue with pain but his eyes bright as if the woman was in his arms, described to me the body of a woman he had never seen. "She is as slippery as an eel, a little plump for my taste, but her flesh is the kind that follows your hands and her skin is so thin and soft, the same temperature as your own, that it doesn't seem to be there to stop you. You know what I mean, she isn't enclosed in it like most women, there's nothing private about her, I mean in bed, otherwise, the funny part is she's artificial as Hell; she wears that awful pancake makeup and Philo says she puts it on down to her navel, but he says with the lights out her body is like what I said, a wet eel. He says he doesn't even like her, but he goes to her room and has it out with her twice a week. She's perfectly well but can't let go her crutch. He says she goes almost mad with fear if you so much as reach for it or try to tell her she doesn't need it anymore. I asked him if she slept with it and he said, 'Yes;' he said he's bruised his shins on it more than once. I don't know as I want her," Kelly ended up. "I can't really stand women as women," he went on, "I can't stand a woman, one of those *female* women,

from behind; you're the only woman I've ever admired from behind, you don't do it "

"What don't I do?"

"I can't describe it but it makes me sick, and mad, too; it's the *shift* of their butts, if you must know, the way they go up and down when they walk, Jesus! When mother puts on pants I actually vomit. Philo drinks like a fish and he tells me he gave himself a turn the other day; he was drunk as a lord at 11 A.M. and he had a new patient, a woman to examine; the nurse had stripped her and she was lying on her stomach; he said, 'Jesus Christ, her breasts began below the belt,' he made a notation about it. He says he's got to quit drinking . . . Quite a lot goes on around here." he finished.

As he did so we saw the door opposite his, across the patio, open and the old bank president, a hand on either door jamb, cautiously came out into the sunlight, at his elbow his special nurse.

"Careful Mr. Hubbell."

"Careful," he repeated.

"Look at that old bastard," said Kelly, "I bet he's paying for a misspent youth."

As he spoke the nurse suddenly let go of the man's elbow from behind where she was useless and nimbly ran ahead of him; facing him, she caught him as he fell straight at her, eyes open, a slight apologetic smile on his face, straight forward from the ankles like a ninepin, without crumpling or bending. We watched her straighten him up and the same performance repeated three times; then she left him standing but swaying a little.

"Don't move," she said sternly and she whisked out a wheel chair. She held it behind him, one spotless white shoe

under the wheel, while she leaned over and around him, and tried to push him into it by bending him in the middle. but he was a big man and he stiffened himself.

"No, no, Miss, I want to go for a nice walk."

The little nurse quit being gentle, let go of him, took hold of the chair with both hands and pushed it hard against the calves of his legs from behind. The bank president sat down quick and hard.

"There, there," she said, tucking him in with a big plaid blanket, "be a good boy, Daddy," and she took the huge white handkerchief out of his pyjama pocket and held it for him to blow his nose; he was crying.

"I will, too, go for a walk next time," he said.

"Naughty," she said, and he looked pleasantly around him, his head shaking a little from side to side, quite contented.

"He scares me," I said, "when he sees me he starts right at me, bending forward from the ankles like that, off balance, I'm always afraid his nurse won't get there and he'll fall flat on his face. I'm afraid to look at him, he starts at once . . ."

"I bet," said Kelly with a sneer, "he'd still like to get his filthy hands on you. I bet that little number, his nurse, has to be pretty quick to keep from losing her pants, she isn't bad looking either."

I looked at Kelly, really lovable, good-looking, and wondered why he didn't see himself ending as the bank president had; too young to identify himself with the old man. he felt no pity. I wondered too, about lust. "Don't they ever get over it?" I thought and although I felt for the grievous and trembling big man, senile before his time, sniveling. I saw him in my mind fumbling with the young

nurse's skirts and she slapping his hands, "Naughty boy," and I felt such a strong disgust I could not sit still.

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be back."

"I shouldn't talk to a nice girl like you the way I do," said Kelly, "but you are too intelligent to be a prude, arn't you?"

"I'll be back, Kelly, I'll get some ice from the nurse. So long."

"Don't be long."

"I won't."



I put on my pink straw hat and went out in the blinding heat.

"Five minutes," called a nurse from the office.

I came upon Dr. Paul crossing the court; he wore no hat and his eyes looked like black slits in his face, shut down as they were to avoid the brightness.

"You shouldn't be out in this sun," he said, "with bare legs and arms," he looked me over coolly, his mind on his work. "Walk a little slower," he said as he turned and went along with me, and I remembered.

At a crosswalk ahead of us the black-haired headwaitress with flaming cheeks, rouged to the ears, walked easily across our line of vision as if on an artificial horizon balancing a tray covered with a white napkin; her short-skirted uniform showed the front and backs of her knees and her buttocks moved up and down like something to do with a locomotive, she had a long and graceful stride; and she held her head as if she carried something on it, too, as well as on her upturned palm; we watched her until she disappeared around a turn, whistling. Paul spoke as if I were not there.

"What a walk! I love that vitality, that beautiful stride!"

A sudden jealousy made me cry out, "She's a Christian!"

Paul looked at me. "Why, Noel, what do you mean?" His face was very drawn, he looked really ill.

I was terribly ashamed of myself but he did not seem to understand exactly what I meant; he seemed dazed like a person who can't think of a familiar word that at the moment is important to him. I did not like him to look so helpless, but, rather than pity, I felt anger, as if something were failing me, something being handed me to look after that I didn't want to take the responsibility for; I almost felt like crying out with Mrs. Tibbitts, "No, no, I am the sickest."

"I don't mean *anything*," I said irritably and I suddenly crashed into Paul, laughing and jumping away from the jumping cactus, my *cholla* friend of the other evening.

"It tried to *rape* me," I said.

"What funny, violent language you use," he said.

"It's because I am angry."

"I'll walk back with you and see Aziere Leduc," and we came into the patio. Paul said sadly, "I seem to disgust her," and I knew he thought it was because he was a Jew but if he only knew! To Aziere it is the same as if a Christian sat on her bed.

"Don't, don't sit on my bed!" I heard her call out, and his gentle reply, "Of course I won't; are you a little better, Aziere?"

I turned to look across the open side of the patio, over the big desert, that was quivering in the sun under a fine dusty haze; I seemed to see the colors of the rainbow in the dry suspended fog. "It is very beautiful," I said to myself.

Mr. Hubbell! The old bank president is loose!

"Nurse!" I call.

He came straight at me. What had he been up to in the desert, how did he manage?

"Nurse!"

Leaning forward from the ankles, he came ahead fast, his steps becoming shorter and shorter as he progressively lost his balance; with no attempt to break his fall with his hands (I imagine he thinks the earth is turning with him! Away from him, and he must hurry), a simpering smile on his lewd old physiognomy, running at the eyes, and drooling at the mouth like a hungry dog, the moment came, and with no hesitation in my mind, no panic, I deliberately stepped back and watched him crash.

"Oh, oh?" he said wonderingly just before he hit.

"He ran away!" his nurse called out as she ran into the patio, her cap on end, a bottle of glittering urine in one hand.



Last night when the patients were all supposed to be asleep, each wrapped in the synthetic comfort, the ghostly stillness of a grain and a half of amytol, and I alone lay in bundles of blankets on my deck chair in the patio, looking, I suppose, like one more dark shadow in the afterglow, I saw them bring Sidney, the sunburned girl, out of her room on a stretcher; no one spoke; all in white with silent sneakers on their feet three internes and three nurses carried her stealthily away and all I could think of was, "She'll give no more trouble now." I went into my room trailing my blankets like a squaw and got into bed. I lay a long time, the smell of a subtle perfume from Sidney's room mingled

with a nameless disinfectant in my nostrils, until the strong astringent odor of burning mesquite came over the desert with a change of wind and the security of my "home," the sprawling comfort-station, soothed me, at least eased the tension in my muscles and I went to sleep. Sidney's removal was like taking nothing from nothing; the zero of suspended animation, sleep, hung over the patio.



Dick, too, is dead. A sharp smell of whiskey that comes in and out with the doctors as they visit is the only sign of the passing of our friends in the sanitarium. A slight exaggeration of cheerfulness in the staff's greetings to the patients, a cold calm in the attitude of the nurses, certain doors sealed, announce to us who are perceptive of death, its coming. We are never told in any other way and if some one of the living asks after one who is gone, "She is in another patio. He has gone home," is the reply. We live forever. I have seen patients wink at each other as one of them calls out, "Hey, Doc, how is so-and-so?"

Poor Dick, with his hair like wet leaves, his long childish eyelashes beaded with tears, his scarlet cheeks, his plaintive, bitter question: "Will she kiss me goodnight?" Will the angels refuse to drink from the cup he drank from? I am miserable with remorse. Hadn't I planned so carefully, every detail looked after, to go up to his forbidden room and kiss him? I had meant to sneak in early in the morning and sit beside his bed, wait for any suspicion of pity to subside and kiss his mouth, "Goodnight, Dick."

Well . . .



"Noel!"

"Yes."

"Come here. . . . I have hot flushes like a woman in the menopause," said John Hendricks.

"Is that so," I giggled. I heard Mrs. Tibbitts talking away to herself.

"Dear God, will insults never cease," she said.

Can it be that Sidney's death has suggested to her that Sidney was the sickest? I see John looking past me at the door.

"Excuse me," says a new nurse, standing in back of a wheel chair with a patient, "is this room No. 10?"

"I'm not dead yet," said John, "Hell, no, but come in."

"It's over there," I said, pointing to Sidney's room.

The patient said, "Thank you so much," not knowing that she would sleep, or lie awake, perhaps, tonight in a room scarcely vacated, merely fumigated.

"She looks nice," said John, and I saw that look.

I had seen only a "well bred," little woman about thirty, dressed in "good taste," a single strand of cultured pearls around her throat, a "dressmaker" suit, medium-heeled pumps, a sweet plump face, navy blue gloves; in a word, some commuter's perfectly nice wife who had "attended" Smith and spent the summers at Madison, Connecticut. But John, I suppose, had undressed her. I looked at him, a good-looking, big man as "normal" as the new patient and with a normal wife at home and the average number of normal children.

But as if I had read his mind, he said, "This life isn't *normal* for a man, it's easier on a woman."

Even his conversation is normal! "You fool," I said to myself

"Death and desire," I think; I feel them both in the air and I remember a placid, limpid lake, a drowned boy, blue and swollen, a sweet taste in my mouth, and Dominick on my side. Dominick! A quick, sharp pain, the pain that pleasure gives, ran over my body like railroads on a map, concentrating, as around a city, between my thighs. John is looking across the patio at the door of No. 10. The nurse has left it open and through the screen, as through a soft haze, we can see her undressing the new patient.

"Hell," said John impatiently.

"How are your fish?" I said, sick of the whole thing. I knelt down and looked into one of the tanks; a lot of little pink ones, all exactly the same size, were, two by two, mouth to mouth, their lips, if fish have lips, extended, kissing each other; one of them, temporarily confused, was facing me, a fine study in foreshortening, his mouth stuck to the glass, sucking away, his eyes wide and pupilless.

"Eeek," I said.

"Kissing fish," said John.

"So I notice."

"Wet smacks," said John.

"Eeek," I repeated . . .



The chef outdid himself in materials if not in the art of cookery, seeking, under orders, to comfort the stomachs of the remaining patients, and Kelly and I uncovered in his room, off sterile trays, a menu consisting of flabby filet mignon with droopy mushrooms, saltless; peas a la française; tired pommes soufflés and a chocolate sundae. Also on the trays were fresh new cartons. But after excellent, five-to-one martinis it could have been creamed doorknobs;

we ate it all and I placed the denuded dishes outside in the patio.

"Look," said Kelly.

They were removing the bank president's effects: a radio, some files, a big white vase of old carnations; a little nurse was giggling, almost stifled under a pile of linen and blankets; she pretended to stagger, "Whoops!"

"Funny, isn't it," said Kelly, "Christ, three in a week."

A young interne came in. "Hi, Reggie," Kelly greeted him, "how about a drink?"

"I could stand a snort," said the young man; he looked harassed and sleepless.

"The old fellow kick the bucket?" asked Kelly.

"Oh, no," said the interne, "well, thanks for the drink."

"Noel," said Kelly, "for God's sake give a fellow a break, come here."

I willingly moved over to him; standing, I took his hand, feeling nothing but pity.

"You *pity* me," said Kelly bitterly, "but what do you do with Paul all night?"

I didn't answer.

"He's always in your room; did you know he is a Jew?"

"Yes."

"Are you engaged or something—back home?"

I didn't answer.

"Noel, for Christ's sake!"

"Please, Kelly darling, please."

"Lie down beside me," said Kelly sadly, and I did.

I could not relax on the hard bed but I lay on my side and gave him my mouth as he turned his head; I cautiously lifted my leg and embraced his thigh lightly not wanting to hurt him. He could not move. "I must do everything," I

thought. I felt my body warming up against his side but in my mind I imagined nothing.

"My God," said Kelly in a husky whisper, "don't you know what I want?"

* * *

Kelly lay motionless with half closed eyes, smiling. I went to his closet and brought him a light, wool blanket; I tenderly covered him, and feeling as if he were a child of mine, I kissed him softly on the forehead. He raised one hand as I bent over him and took my right breast; he pinched the nipple and let go; "Sweetheart," he whispered and went to sleep. I cautiously slid out his screened door, avoiding the dishes, and went back to my own room. "Perhaps I have made it up to Dick," I said to myself: my remorse had vanished. But I felt uneasy, I thought of Paul's involuntary appeal for sympathy. "Is this being a woman," I said to myself in the mirror. "How many mothers does a man want? Am I never to be loved, taken care of? Will the male take no responsibility?" And as I lay in bed I censored myself, "Did you love Dick that you meant to kiss him goodnight? Did you love Kelly that you gave him what he wanted against your own inclination? Or have you got a Goddamn St. Anthony complex? Are you a saint that you will lie on the breast of a leper, mouth to mouth?" But I exonerated myself: face to face with my soul in the dead of a desert night I knew I was innocent of martyrdom: I did not feel the emotional thrill of the true saint. I slept rather well for me. I did not wait for Paul.



It has been too hot to write, a burning heat like an intense white light, and the cold, too, after midnight, is as intense. Heat and cold in the desert resemble each other closely and each is a terrible exaggeration. All the sleeping pills in the cupboards wouldn't put the patients to sleep in this weather, this intense, exciting climate. We can hear each other's hearts racing, our eyes are wide open, a kind of heightened vitality like burning leaves is reducing our weight like a brilliant erosion as if someone had set a special torch to all the carbohydrates at once and the perfume of our burning flesh mingles with that of the mesquite. The patients are stuffed with calories and the cream, too, is fat on the fire; a wild melting energy in our blood keeps us lean, burns up our flesh; there isn't a drop of venous blood in us, it is all from the arteries, bright red, the consistency of ink; if we were cut we would bleed to death like a hemophilic. Our minds never rest, either; our imaginations lead us into non-fattening places.

"You *must* drink your half-in-half," says my nurse.

"What is the relation between the width of the hips and a lesion in the lung?" I retorted.

Last night, as I lay wide awake, I heard the dactyl tread, the trisyllabic walk, as it were, of the bold and turbulent woman known as Virus X. I did not have to sit up in bed to know from the lessening sound of the retreating taps that she was crossing the patio; then I heard the first door open and close; that is John's room.

"She'll never make him," Kelly had said.

But John has changed. We all have watched the immodest pursuit and mutual, palpable seduction, the consumption in the open, almost, of John and the normal woman. An arthritic, her negative appearance has improved in the

sun. Her daily sun baths have clarified and warmed up her domestic, confined-to-the-house, looks. Controlled as the sun baths are, the patient stripped,* except for pads over the eyes and a tiny G string, and taking only the early morning and late afternoon sun, the bodies of the arthritics turn a beautiful golden, soft tantalizing, brown. Constantly oiled, too, their skin is as smooth and moist as a baby's or an Oriental's.

With this handsome viceroy, which John does not hesitate to boast of having seen (Baby!), the normal woman, who at first glance had given him a secret high-sign that had passed me by, has changed him from an average clubman, chatting on the eighteenth green about his new television, into a sexual show-off like a prize fighter. He has been allowed out for short walks for some time, carefully timed, of course, his temperature taken immediately before and after, and he comes into the patio in a sweat-shirt and shorts making a play for attention, eyeing the door of No. 10; he flexes his new muscles, pulls in his stomach, "Boy, I'm sweatin'," but there is still the effeminate line of the hips from long bed-rest and the fattening process, the de-sexing, almost, of the body from prolonged disuse. But John wants us to know he hasn't lost anything after his enforced continence.

And the virtuous housewife, too, purrs in B Minor like a pussycat in heat. The face that had reflected nothing, it seemed to me, but a fair game of bridge and a nodding acquaintance with Fannie Merritt Farmer and the Book of the Month Club, now is as immodestly voluptuous as a strip-tease dancer's; there is nothing subtle in her expression; it says, "Quick, hurry up, some more," and it is as ugly, as crude, as any "love light" I have ever seen; she

makes Virus X look like *The Little Colonel*. At the same time she lacks sophistication but neither is she innocent, as an animal is innocent.

"She's hot," John said to me, and, "I'm this same lovely color all over," she said, leaning down and drawing her forefinger up her bare leg.

It left a colorless line that slowly filled in like pouring browned butter over a piece of white asparagus. Her vanity isn't like the excusable and even attractive, necessary vanity of lovely women, it is a lust for her own body; it makes the cleverer, more sophisticated woman blush; she pats and snuggles up to herself, makes gestures that women control unless they are dreaming, like a couple of lizards on a tree, all with the lewd and open expression of the inexperienced, almost moronic sensualist. She invites rape.

If I am over-preoccupied with this woman's symptoms it is an "overness" endemic to this life in this place; it's not original in me—a kind of geographic depravity rather than a genetic endowment, encouraged by the climate, the latitude and longitude, the doctors, the ideographic flora, even the eccentric fauna sent unwittingly to John by his wife; added to this: incarceration, the weird attraction of the sick, each of us Camille; the concentration of the invalid on the elixir of life: the sperm, the foetus, and finally the cadaver; autopsy, itself, a kind of controlled rape that the medico, nearest of kin to these incurables, indulges in; excused only by his professional curiosity, he fondles the throbbing viscera of his sweetheart; her only response somatic. Deep in the question of what word there might be between artless and not artless, how evil can the ignorant be, Kelly's mother came in.

"Dear," she said, "am I disturbing you?" She seemed

distraught. "May I call you Noel?"

"Please sit down," I said coldly, "may I finish my paragraph?" It gave me time to collect myself; I felt such anger at this stupid woman.

"Noel, dear child, *do* amuse him!" (I am speechless.) "He is so ill, so depressed, you are so gay, so pretty, you are so good for him . . . You will see him often?" she pleaded.

"Why, yes, of course, Mrs. Vanderbilt, I like Kelly, it's fun for me, too."

All my anger went away; her complete change of stand without any explanation whatever gave her a kind of dignity in my eyes; it was completely feminine without false pride or apology, one woman appealing to another. "Let us make this little male child happy, what else is there?" she seemed to say. I looked at her pearls, her diamonds, her sheer stockings, her beautiful legs, but on her forehead I saw between her eyebrows like the sign of Indian aristocracy a little image of her crippled son, her bad boy. It was as if she said, "I beg of you to take him into your womb and comfort him."

"I will," I said out loud.

Later, in Kelly's room, I said, "Your mother came to see me, she is very nice."

"What did she want?" he said suspiciously. "She treats me like a child, I have to ask for every quarter I get."

"Sssh, be quiet," I said. "Look how handsome Orion is tonight, and look at the Pleiades."

"Tell me a story," said Kelly

The Pleiades were the seven beautiful nymphs of Artemis beloved and pursued by Orion. In answer to their prayers they were changed by Zeus into pigeons and then into stars.

Six are still visible but one left her place and flamed through space, disintegrating in the stratosphere, that she might not behold the Fall of Troy."



I cannot describe my feelings. I am going home. They are making ready my dismissal papers, wrapping up my x-rays; I am honorably discharged. I will begin at the beginning: the morning after I left Kelly sleeping peacefully, put to sleep by my storytelling of the Pleiades, my nurse brought me on my tray a telegram: "Arrive 2 P.M. your time. Henry Vanderdonck."

I asked immediately for Dr. Paul and he said, "The staff has agreed that as your family is anxious to have you home and as you are so much better you may go . . . Why are you crying?"

I could not think why I was crying so I said, "I love you."

Paul's face looked the way it did when I pointed out that the buxom waitress whose walk he had admired was a Christian

He said, coldly, "It is impossible, I am your doctor."

"I take it back," I said, wanting to strike him, "I do not love you."

I saw his blue eyes get cloudy and dark as if the pupils had broken.

"I shall miss you," he said sadly, "will you write me?"

Why doesn't he take a stand and hold it? He disintegrates in front of me and leaves me holding the bag with nothing to state.

"Am I really cured?" I asked.

"I should say so, yes, the lesions are healed, in a year or so you will have forgotten . . ."

"A coyote!" screamed a woman in the next patio, and we looked out into the court; a big meager dog, head down, loped off into the desert.

"Dr. Paul," called out Aziere, "why haven't you been to see *me*?"

"Coming right away," said Paul, "Noel, don't say good-by to the others."

"Not say good-by?"

"No, it's better if you just go, we will send your things."

A strange fear came over me and I could not think what it signified, but he left and I thought of the stretcher coming out of Sidney's room, Dick's empty bed, the old man's effects being moved, everything fumigated, the doors sealed. I trembled; my knees felt so weak I sat down on the bed, I blushed furiously. I saw the remaining patients wink at each other. "Hi, Doc, how's Noel today?"

No! The staff would not be so cruel as to announce my death to me like this! Not even let me say good-by, not to Kelly, to Aziere, John! ". . . it is better if you go, we will send your things." I suddenly lost control and began to sob, "No, no, no!" I wanted to beat on the wall. "No, no, no, please!" The nurse on duty in the patio came running.

"Noel," she said, closing my door. "what is it?"

"No, no!" I said, "I don't want to . . ."

"Don't want to what, dear? This is so unlike you, you've been such a good patient, Dr. Paul was just saying . . ."

"I don't want to . . . to . . . to . . ." I sobbed, and stopped. I could not say "die." And as I think, as I write, of my deep psychological fear I realize how successful the system had been, how taboo death was in this place; it must not be mentioned; it does not happen. I am not going

to die, I am simply going home. A funny noise in my throat is not a laugh. "Noel? Oh, she went home."

And so the day passed like any other. I felt in honor bound not to announce my death and I speak like this because I am convinced that this is no ordinary leave-taking and I must quiet the uneasy fears, the apprehension of the living, those who will remain alive in the patio. I understand their winks and jokes because they are like knowing children who don't quite believe in Santa Claus any more but who are comforted nevertheless by the security of the sanitarium, the confidence they have in the doctors, paterfamilias. Their little jokes make them feel stronger; I remember Mr. Vanderdonck's vulgar witticisms in front of Frieda, the woman he was most afraid of, the one he least understood, or could contend with. (Death and desire how they go hand in hand.)

After my nap I said to my nurse, "Tell me, does anyone ever die here?"

"Of course not," she said.



I am trying to write on the train in the tiny single room that so ingeniously provides for the needs of the traveler, still alive, not yet abstracted. This is my transmigration and I wonder what form I will take in the cosmos I have a one-way ticket to, and if it will seem like home. Will the people I meet and love remind me somehow of themselves? Will I feel as I enter some room, make a turn in some path, I have been here before? Will I listen to a conversation of no particular importance, anticipating its content, its very phraseology, and hear myself repeat what I have heard myself say before under the identical circumstance? Only

to find the next moment that I am a stranger, that I do not know where my next step will lead me, whether my next words will be tender or angry, the person in the farther room my sweetheart or my enemy, my cousin, my grandfather? What infinitesimal identity will I have and will there be mirrors where I shall meet myself?

How strange and insecure it feels to be nowhere! This little room on wheels does not lull my senses in the least; I am not deceived; I am nowhere. I am offered what it seems to me I need least in this middle strata which is neither here nor there; certainly it is not home. Transition is furnished with a bed, symbol of death and desire; a modest, fold-away, immaculate toilet. How it shines! It, too, a symbol of decay; and the polished chromium basin for me to wash in, a symbol of guilt. ("All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.") But who put this sweet desk in here with ink, paper? Is this the place to write, ave and vale? Could it be the confessional? Or is this really the point of the whole thing, the essence, that which is left when everything else has been abstracted, that endures; this little desk, then, does it signify the spirit? I remember that novel erosion in the desert that deposited only the gigantic phallus, in competition, almost, with Heaven, where you can't take it with you; where the opposite is epitomized. And I think of the sanitarium, that sanctuary, where sex became so all-important just before dying; how it lighted up the faces of the crippled and ill and shone through the skin of incurable women. Even the doctors were preoccupied and uneasy with its insistent appeal, its powerful drive. What will take its place where I am going? Or isn't it inter-changeable? Is it indestructible, like matter? The strange appeal too of the sick for the sick, a bodily attraction, a kind of poetic lust.

With the exception of Paul's temporary desire for the buxom over-tinted waitress which was only the last cry of the old senses, a biblical allusion, perhaps, we loved each other's symptoms. Even Virus X, the glamorous virago, I think, would not have attracted Dr. Philo without the allure of a third leg. The light smell of ether in the night like a nimbus clinging to the doctors incited secondary fantasies in the patients. A queer withdrawn look in Paul's eyes, an absentminded abbreviation in his palpitating pupils that seemed to breathe like a cat's, accompanied by that sweet smell, acted like an aphrodisiac and made me shiver with pleasure as I imagined the imaginings of Paul. I wanted to join him in that perfumed hinterland of swaying poppies and suave wheat where quartets of transparent bodies cling like dragonflies to their senses, the whole scene throbbing like pleasure in the night. But I never dared ask Paul about the "ether sniffing" that the patients talked about and the doctors kept quiet about. Every now and then an indiscreet nurse would bring it up: "I was deathly sick," she would add as part of the dogma, but we all longed for this seductive sequel to our life in bed.

When Mr. Vanderdonck arrived, late of course, it was like rape, too soon: it was like a big bull penetrating a fragile china cup! I mean his entrance into the sanctuary, so big, so healthy, so smelling of expensive tobacco and that other healthy creature, Leda, and exuding protein, was as shocking to all the membranes of my body as if a big foot burst through the gauze curtain of a puppet show or as if a pterodactyl fell on the stage of *L'Après-midi d'Un Faun*. I swear I was ashamed of my offensive visitor, so tactless, noisy, healthy and immodest, so immodest it was as if he wore revealing tights like a Barrymore, or to bring

it up to date, Massine or Lifar. If my language seems exaggerated, it too that we all use is also due to our incarceration in that university of big ideas and devastating figments, the violent tutelage of imprisonment. Mrs. Tibbitts no longer murmurs, "How long, oh Lord, how long?" but "For Christ's sake, let me out of here!"

But Mr. Vanderdonck's disgusting health is another matter, as I think I have made clear; here is an exaggeration, not like a precise sign in mathematics (+), keen and clear, but like the hypnopompic transition (the peculiar sensation of inflation just before one sleeps), a hideous nightmare. Poor Henny, I ask his pardon for the feelings I had at his presence in the sanitarium. Away from it I am quickly becoming used to him; he reminds me of himself and is the first landscape to my return like a familiar tree in the driveway; I am not completely alone in my transmigration and I am grateful that he is sitting in the club car, waiting for me, smoking a cigar and drinking a glass of port.



"You look fit, little timberdoodle," Mr. Vanderdonck greeted me, "but thin, you need fattening up. Leda-my-pet has gained twelve pounds in the right places and the more there is of her the better I like her."

He patted my knee, and by pursing and twisting his lips he made his mustache go around in a circle like Russe's tail.

"How is my darling Russe?" I asked.

"Mr. Vanderdonck was looking at me. "How did you stand that place, you poor kid, it even depressed *me* in a couple of hours."

I thought of the stimuli that I have tried to describe, of

love and lust in a sanitarium, of vendetta and trauma, principles based on whimsical notions, fantasy and credo; I thought of morphine, burning mesquite, valerian, Vichy water, oxide of zinc and assafoetida; of opium, digitalis, belladonna and quinine; I thought of cadmium yellow, alizarine red, cobalt blue and rose madder, jumping cacti, inverted nipples; I saw the glittering urine in the bottle that the nurse clutched as she came running just too late to save the old bank president from sudden death, and I smiled.

"Weren't you *bored*?"

I kept on smiling.

"That Leduc girl must have been pretty once, what does she think about all day?" He twitched his mustache to a right angle and brought it down again. "Eh?"

I wanted to giggle. "I'd hate to tell you," I said, and I wondered what would happen to his male vanity if he knew what Aziere compared his precious private parts to.

"You remember Frieda?" he said. It was as if a probing analyst had forked up something out of my subconscious. Except for the time of the nightmare, the nocturnal sweat, the vis a terge, when I had heard myself wail, "Frieda!" I had forgotten her!

"Frieda," I said.

"Yes, the *sacrée petite charogne*" [said of brave little prostitutes], he said, with it seemed to me contempt, "she is a good Catholic now, we hear," and if possible his good-natured contempt doubled.

I pictured the slim, pale Frieda lovingly lighting fat candles to St. Gerard, the one who mystically heals barren women, and I liked thinking of her in a purer region of the senses, at a less malign source, as it were, my Frieda, *emeritas*.

"Shall we eat?" said Mr. Vanderdonck.

As we walked back to the dining car the train lurched heavily throwing me against one of the steel doors, hurting me.

"The Goddamn son of a bitch!" I said; I felt my face flush.

Mr. Vanderdonck's astonished expression as he stared at me made me laugh.

"Noel!" he said.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but the engineer's a bastard."

"It will never do," he said, shaking his head, "at home."

"Is that where I am going," I said, "home?"

Samanta Kr. Majumder

Address

Date

PART THREE

HOME is not the easiest place to get used to. I lack courage and only the courageous dare return. I lack too the ability to adjust myself to the subconscious, as home is the subconscious. The comforts of home, the security of the attic, the cellar, the drawing room, constitute the architectural womb, the benevolent institution of home; I appreciate the benefits both to son and father of the words accompanying the expulsion, "Never darken my door again!" while I am doubtful of the sanity, even, of the maternal daydream, the terrible desire of the uninhabited womb, the innocent plea, "Come home!" God, the big mother who expelled those twins of His bosom, Adam and Eve, bids us all come back to Heaven, "But take not thy identity over My threshold." The Church, scholastically logical, prays to Mary, avoiding the possibility of implicating God, the male, in the great riddle, but divesting her of physical connotation as she divests them of eachness, and so innocence is accomplished, the theme of goodness strictly adhered to. You would think that knowing what I do,

tutored by solitude and insomnia, I would continue my research and not come home to this ominous reverie but knowledge and intuition are not of practical use.

Mr. Vanderdonck brought me safely back to the ribbon-like tentacles of propriety in the person of Aunt, the painful nourishment of the poetic eccentricities of my dead Grandfather, the ambivalent realism of Leda and himself, the memory of Frieda; the shock of Dominick's manhood. Russe, graying at the muzzle, comforts me. I am still afraid of Sun Beau who recalls an even earlier, nameless terror, I suppose; and in Herbie, the Hereford's, place there is a Black Angus with purple translucent eyes.



"Why didn't you answer my letters?" Dominick asked me.

"You mean the one beginning, 'How come Héloïse wrote in the style of Lord Macaulay?' or the one about 'Ymir the ancestor of Teutonic giants; formed of the frost and fire in Ginnungagap?'"

"Oh, the creed," he said.

"The creed?"

"His flesh became earth; his blood, the sea; his bones, the mountains; his teeth, the cliffs; his skull the heavens, wherein his brains float in the form of clouds.' . . . Noel?"

Immediately I know that I have heard that inflection before, at once I sense, before it begins, my response. It is the first time I have recognized Dominick. I have been home a week and all the others, their speech, their habits, their daily exercises, their hands, the smell of them, and the furniture too, the pictures, the set of the trees, even the special place the sun goes down from my window, the position of my bed laid out North and South bring back a former

existence but Dominick I could not establish. A tall manly stranger wandered about the house avoiding me, I thought, and almost always a step or two behind Leda. I did not think, if I thought at all, that this could be the boy whose mouth just reached his mother's breast. Even her dulcet voice saying, "Boysie, my green scarf," and "Sweetheart, my lipstick," did not penetrate my subconscious, or tear away some veil like a gauze maidenhead that made me forget Dominick, kept me virgin for his new beginning with me as if our little past merely gave us insight into each other that is otherwise unexplainable: love at first sight.

And so his vague and questioning, his dialectic "Noel?" re-established him in the composition, as it were, of my existence as if I had been in a room that used to be mine but a certain piece of furniture had been done over or moved and so one feels uneasy until the thing regains its identity and takes on its familiar aspect again; just as in the sanitarium I felt less disturbed when I persuaded the nurse to turn my bed so that it lay North and South as my bed at home did.

I looked at Dominick a long time following his "Noel?" My body had responded quickly but my mind was *piano*, perhaps because it wanted more, at least wanted to understand; it was like trying to remember what the taste of taffy meant or the smell of shoe polish and what else it reminded me of. It came to me, fragmentary at first and then altogether, but it was preceded by a vivid image of Frieda; I don't know why but she looked like Joan of Arc in the wooden cart that took her to her execution. I shook my head to get rid of her valentine-like effigy, and then Dominick's second "Noel?" gave me everything I was seeking.

"Dominick, it's you!" I cried out, "I *knew* I'd been here before!"

"Come to the playhouse," said Dominick softly.

"Oh, no!" I said at once remembering in swift progression the series of seductions there.

"Into the study, then, we can't stand here in the hall."

"Why can't we stand here in the hall?" I said, not liking either, the connotation of the study where Melody and her fiancé used to whisper and kiss, and where the old man hid, musically sublimating his unrequited love for Brady, his frustration plaintively expressed in perfect pitch.

"Mater," he answered unexpectedly.

"Oh," I said, losing the thread of my thoughts and wanting to go to my room to figure out why I did not go along with Dominick at once; and that is where I am, saving him for later while I catch up on my responses, positive and negative. Leda did come in and Dominick *stepped back from me*. "And what's this?" I said to myself, adding an appendix to my questionnaire.

"See you later, Dominick."

"I didn't *mean* to interrupt you and Boysie," Leda sang out.

She had come in like the anticipated entrance of the leading lady in the first act, Dominick and I, as we stood in the hall, merely introductory players; her pliant arms were full of the first forsythia, her hair gleaming, her big eyes like two cups of strong tea. As Henny so complacently said, she has gained weight but in the right places, just more of her to displace unnecessary and invisible elements and she does not look large, we look little. Only Henny expands along with Leda and his big frame draped in handsome bolts of imported tweed is a physical match for her full

rounded hips like a mare. I believe he still
me and in first position too but I do not think he
canters her for long nor is there any pacifying lump of sugar
or farewell pat. Their union each time is a bonanza and
they are so well suited, if you want to call it that, that it is
hard to say whether, in between their commerce, Henny's
jacket smells more like Leda's passionate perfume or Leda's
hair and ears like Henny's tobacco, Lachryma Christi, and
heather. You would think a more durable dynasty would
have been founded by these pilgrims in an old house built
on rock, than their one issue, my conjectural Dominick. It
is as if they were foster parents to genius, had found a little
Moses in the bulrushes or an innocent Oedipus, ignorant of
his destiny, among the goats. I am getting used to their
exuberant presence but only because I have been here be-
fore. I felt better in the understatement of illness, the
flexibility of the physique compensated for by the flighty in-
stability, the fantasy and exaggeration of the life in the
sanitarium. The strange forbidden passions of the patients
did not disgust me as the more obvious inevitable necessity,
the meridian, almost, of Henny and Leda's headlong tem-
porary desires. My Grandfather's symbolic love of the flute,
his degree of acuteness or graveness of a musical note, and
Frieda's peculiar deductive philosophy and anonymous
credo, Aunt's straddling the soft low pillion that separates
her from Sun Beau are more in keeping with what I have
become used to; but I lack the control of these aforemen-
tioned examples; I have learned from Kelly and the others,
Virus X and Aziere Leduc, a violent language, vivid images,
fission and fusion, as it were, a kind of trigger happiness. I
feel that I have certain rights, too, which I have paid for
in advance, perhaps; and five minutes ago in the hall I felt

the powerful presence of the *other woman* . . . And this other woman is the same woman who in that same hall had sent Dominick and me upstairs to do "you know what." . . . "Run along now and do you know what with Noel." My heart is beating hard and slow, my face is flushed. "The bitch," I whisper.



But an evenness, an equipoise, is taking place within me; I am becoming adjusted to my subconscious, I am accepting nostalgia, and the exciting past, the real part of my life, the only present I can remember is more like having been to the hippodrome or the circus. I am getting acquainted, too, with my "relatives" as if I were adopted; disparity is excused, homogenation is inevitable, environment is the answer. Spring is here too, so unlike the simmering heat of the desert; it is as soothing as a warm bath; a tepid fragrance is in my nostrils, my hair curls in the humid air, my vision blurs. It is as if the earth at last relaxed and slept, breathing easily, perspiring a little, and all the little fishes and birds in wood, field and stream began softly to play and make love and multiply in a gentle kind of way. Even the young osprey over the pond dives more sensuously than intently at a big-eyed trout. And the trout is too fat and lazy to do more than glance at a hatch of gnats that rises and falls over the surface of the pond as if altogether, like a tiny cloud, it was breathing or sighing. No one wants to leave his fingerprints on my Grandfather's precious collection of caddis nymphs, streamers and bucktails, and stone flies, it is as if they had been buried with the old man; and so the fish rattle and bump against the lily pads, lazily break water, forgetting where the surface is, or heavily lurch upward falling back tail first just for nothing.

Dominick and I lie along the two damp planks of the rowboat dock and stare into the dark water watching the yellow and blue and green lights and the brown trout, almost indistinguishable from their protective pools and light reflection and wet leaves.

"I see one!" I whisper.

He is so still, like silence itself, but I can see his body move imperceptibly to keep his balance in his element.

"Don't," says Dominick, but I slowly put my long forefinger down into the water. Ordinarily you get quite a start when you touch the cold smooth body of a live fish under water and his sudden movement surprises you even though you were prepared for it, but this one did not dart away at my touch, instead he moved voluptuously. Dominick and I lay smiling down into the depths.

"He wants me to pet him," I whispered. Again I gently poked the trout. This time he really startled us both; the reflections broke up like fireworks in our faces, everything quivered as he streaked down and away; a tiny trail of silver air bubbles behind him outlined where he had been; the water scarcely had time to fill in after him. We both laughed and lay quietly together, scarcely moving, till supper time. The lovely weighty shape of the tapering trout lies in my frontal lobes as if in an aspic and the deep soft leafy brown that colored him I can see against the backs of my closed eyelids. If I squeeze them down hard the color breaks up into brilliant moats just as the water did and if I open them I see Dominick's hazel eyes, a combination of the warm blown of the trout and the clear blue of the steady quiet sky.

"A sweet singing saxicoline bird," Dominick said, which didn't call for an answer and it seemed to me when he

added a little later, "Ahimsa" [non-violence], that that was just it.

As we rose, lazily, pulling each other up and swaying in our almost airless surroundings two young cygnets came hard around a bend in the shore pushing the water up in front of them like two sturdy little tugs followed by twin wakes, their pink paddles churning, their long necks like letter S's, their alligator lips gulping the little clouds of innocent gnats suspended over the surface. The elegant shape of the trout melted away in my mind and the little homily of my thoughts, the plain little discourse of almost religious quiet was broken.

Without any introduction and not remembering what I was talking about I said to Dominick, "Do you tell your mother everything?"

Dominick said, "I was thinking of what Anatole France said about Napoleon, 'He thought what every grenadier in the army thought, but he thought it with unprecedented force.'"

Not knowing why I said what I said I did not ask him why he said what he said, and we came back to his house hand in hand without any feeling of misunderstanding or frustration.

Leda lay on a wide Hawaiian couch flanked by fat cushions, her legs apart, her feet bare. She had brushed her thick hair up over her temples and behind her ears as if it were August.

"Hello, Babies," she said. "Come here, Sweet," to Dominick.

Dominick obediently sat down beside her and I noticed again how weightless he seemed. She pulled his head down

on her breast and closing her eyes caressed the back of his neck with her fingers.

"Yes, Mater," Dominick said.

"Yes, Mater," she mimicked and she laughed so joyously, without affectation, that Henny, who was lying along the railing of the porch, threw back his head and joined her; a woodpecker began a terrific assault on a drain pipe.

But I felt a chill along the under side of my arms where the skin is thin, and a queer disgust. I wiggled my toes inside my sneakers just to do something, act. "Yes, I have been here before but I am a stranger," I thought. "How healthy they are." I looked dismally at Dominick's long body stretched out beside Leda's and I shook my head to get rid of an image Leda had placed there long ago. "I have to put a *pillow* between us," I had heard her say to Dr. Pynchon, "he's such a little man."



As usual I am trying too hard to figure things out. My pleasure in Dominick is spoiled by my inability to integrate the small boy and the tall man and I wish that I had never seen him before. Neither of us ever says, "Do you remember?" and sometimes I think I am really a stranger, or that he does not recognize me. It is Leda who keeps pulling the little boy out of the old trunk, as it were ("Don't be a tattletale, Boysie,"), certainly not me; for me those days are gone forever; the objects and incidents like a nostalgic blur without content, like an abstract painting without subject matter. It is true I have come back to it, as I have said, but Dominick and I move in *front* of that picture, it is just the back-drop . . . But why does Dominick, himself, keep looking over his shoulder at Leda? Sometimes when I cannot solve

a problem I distinctly feel two ends of a rope in my hands, one in each fist; with all my might I cannot bring them together, they scarcely meet. I suppose the feeling is all there is left of an old gesture; an interested person, I suppose, could scrape the surface paint or accumulated varnish off that scenic backdrop and point out a little girl in a row-boat desperately attempting to unite an old rope that had given under stress. Who is accountable for that *stretch* that won't come back and heal the old rope and why is the little girl trying so hard? And who stood on the bank taking snapshots of symbolic acts or non-acts only to lose them, mislay them, for future frustration?



Busy as I thought my brain was last night, and above, I must have been on the verge of sleep. This morning the problem, like a genie, has gone back into the bottle and won't come out again, I suppose, until after considerable kicking around.



It has been raining for three days, not a Northeaster, at least there seems to be no wind at all, and the soft precipitation hangs in the air brightening the forsythia to an almost startling cadmium yellow and bringing out the primary colors in the lawn and the woods; the wet leaves alone retain an esoteric mauve and violet, and umber and sienna, a secret mixture; the sky is that dove gray that is so becoming to everything else and accentuates and heightens pigment and I am living inside the house as if I were in a thermos. Dominick is here all the time with the exception of two or three hours in his study where his glossological education

continues, openly now. He no longer has to nose out a forbidden book. And as they were forbidden only because they were good, without reference to sin. Dominick finds Bulfinch's *Mythology* and *The Heptameron* comparable; Nerciate and the Marquis de Sade pre-requisites to *Paul and Virginia*.

I wonder about the mind and the body. Dominick's talk in the lonely house, the rain outside like pin pricks on the window-pane holds my entire attention, tantalizes my skin. It is as if his hands were on my body and I am waiting, my whole being concentrating, for a kind of peace that will surely come, a thrilling oblivion. While he talks to me, expressing himself on my mind and my body, giving me so much, he restlessly plays with my hands, bending the fingers back, twisting my wrists, pulling at my hair. He outlines my eyebrows with the tip of a finger, feels the cartilage of my nose, explores my ears. Raising my skirt he lifts a knee-cap and lets it go, cups with his palm the calves of my legs and traces the veins that cross the shin-bones, following them to my ankles; I kick off my slippers and he fondles the soles of my feet, caressing the heels, tickling me between the toes.

"Anti-vivisectionists are just afraid to take things apart and the reason man can't trisect an angle is that he's scared to: he is terrified of disintegration."

"Yes." I murmur and I think, "that is why Philo slept with the three-legged woman 'Submit,' he said."

"Experts," said Dominick with some contempt, and I go on in my own mind with, he attempted to still his fears by intercourse with. "look with suspicion on artists and scientists too, who 'break up' a composition of the human figure, or of anything at all into, after all, its component

parts; 'the deviation' they say, 'insecurity,' but it is apparent that the most fearful are those who respect the whole. To take apart is to imply putting together; the knowledge of the hinge, the edge, the active and passive design, the whole, which is beautiful, which is the cure, as it were, only if the part is familiar, the cause precise; to abstract is to verify. 'Verily,' Jesus said, as he stripped away the realisms of every day life: eating, drinking, whoring; and pasted his parables on the milestones."

"The miracles, Dominick?" I whispered, curling my fingers around his wrist.

"Jesus' white lies," he said. "I find the Eckermann conversations very immature and tiresome," he went on, flattering me by not explaining the transition. "Goethe was precocious."

"Dominick?"

"Yes, Noel, it is true, as you say [I didn't] that people with a system accomplish things, which is a meaningless expression, but they feel safer with a system, that's all, it's not important; the hobo is the perfectly adjusted guy, you know; how sharp you must have to be to be unprepared!"

"Dominick, you hurt that time. Are you defending your thesis for your degree?" I asked, lovingly sarcastic. "What are you going to be when you grow up?"

Dominick stared at me a long time thoughtfully. "I am going to translate Baudelaire's translation of Poe," he said quietly but I felt his hands tremble on my body.



Mr. Vanderdonck says Dominick is studying Innuendo, Evasion and Diplomacy, so he can be President. He said it at dinner last night and Aunt said, "I think a little *practical*

education would be good for a young man in these times with *everything*."

"But he got that in *Paris*," said Henny, laughing.

Dominick spent a year in Paris all by himself while I was learning about life [the thread you hang on by, at least] in the sanitarium.)

"Yes," Dominick said seriously.

"How?" said Aunt, coldly.

"Women," said Dr. Pynchon.

"Right you are, Pynchon," said Henny. "Bagatelles laborieuses."

"I learned physics on the Eiffel Tower," Dominick said, not laughing, "and The Rodin Museum gave me a man's experience with women and a bad headache." ~

"Oh, my Precious," laughed Leda, pouting, "was it too much for him?"

"Christ!" said Henny, "I'll never forget it, myself. My bodily functions quit on me, I couldn't . . ."

"Vanderdonck!" said Dr. Pynchon. "there are ladies present."

"I beg your pardon, Miss James," Mr. Vanderdonck said, a little scared at his own remark this time, but Aunt didn't blush, she just didn't get it; but at Henny's unusual apology she simulated a kind of shocked modesty that made me uneasy.

"Henny!" said Leda, "in front of Noel!"

This made me angry and I felt my eyes burn as I looked at her steadily.

"Noel, what are you looking at me like *that* for?"

Dominick looked up from a book he held in his lap and I felt him gaze curiously from me to his mother. Did he feel it? What I felt?



My abortive anger has left a kind of sediment in my blood stream. I feel that I am dealing with an enemy who wants to segregate me, cut me off from my right flank, as it were, and in this case my right flank is Dominick. I love him so, I would be helpless without him, starve to death in the barracks Leda is trying to shove me into. Her tactics are recognizable, I am afraid, only to me. Wasn't it subtle of her last night to try and make me out a prude like Aunt when she knows that prudery repels Dominick who is so innocent of evil himself, and who hates pretense, anything false. It is true his father's colloquial bravado, his way of saying things, gives his thoughts a certain vulgarity but it is a harmless vulgarity, I think. Dominick, the son of these bawdy and ribald parents like a couple of Elizabethans, has acquired from them an almost primeval innocence and the crudeness has sloughed off. A superior breed has been accomplished in one consummation, it seems. He is as innocent and pure as the first man. It is as if two plus signs had produced a negative, but I mean by a negative an abstraction. I think of Dominick as an angel. Dreaming of him my anger goes away and the tree toads and whistling frogs are putting me to sleep. The rain has stopped.



Yesterday, when Dominick and I were walking in the woods admiring what Spring was doing there, me exclaiming about everything from pink and white dogwood, myrtle and big purple violets to the plump skunk cabbage more prolific than ever in the marsh near the stream, Dominick began to talk about analogy.

"After my translation," he said, twisting my fingers, "I

want to write on analogy; it is even more exciting and just as unrewarding as dialectic. As a philosophy it has infinite possibilities, as a pattern for thought it is impossible to confine so I would never finish. It would be invisible and adjustable."

Dominick stopped and faced me; we stood ankle deep in the cold marsh without noticing it.

"Noel?" he said.

"Not now," I said.

"Look, Noel, if two friends arranged a meeting, traveling on parallel railroads, what would that be?"

"An analogy, Dominick, of course."

"Yes, it is very interesting; it is like trying to put two ends of a rope that has given together."

I jumped inside me. "Are we twins?" I thought. "Twins," I said out loud.

"Yes, a twin is analogous to his twin," Dominick said. "I hadn't thought of that."

Russe and Hilda come and sit down in the wet marsh to cool their haunches. They have been busy racing from smell to smell, tracking it down, pouncing on it, and have covered several miles as they prospected, returning at intervals to circle us, and they are overheated as if it were summer; their tongues are hanging out. Russe lies in the water and cools his stomach and Hilda rolls among the skunk cabbages squirming and yipping, finally lies still a moment, four paws in the air, her head thrown back, her tongue hanging out the side of her mouth. Her tits are bright pink. Frieda! But the name is faded as if it were sewed in the neck of an old sweater.

"Do you remember Frieda?" said Dominick.

"Yes, but . . ."

"Noel," said Dominick without the inflection, "I think we should get out of here."

I didn't understand. "Get out of here?"

"Yes, beat it."

"Aren't you happy?"

"Something is eating *you*," he said, "you've changed."

"Yes, I guess I have."

"It's Mater."

"What?" I didn't think for a minute he knew. "I didn't think you knew."

"Jesus, Noel . . . and you're reticent," he went on.

"You're reserved," I said.

"Mater is just ultra-possessive," he said, "I don't want to talk about it. In the Fall we will get married because I'll be twenty and the next year I get the money Beau-Pa left me before I was conceived."

I wasn't annoyed at Dominick's taking me for granted because I did him, and the proposal was no surprise to either of us.



Yesterday at lunch (Sunday) Dr. Pynchon, to make conversation, said, bending his head sideways toward me as he concentrated on his roast chicken, "How's her education?"

"Tell him it's O.K., thank you," said Henny.

"She ought to have some," said Dr. Pynchon, turning the remaining peas out of the vegetable dish onto his plate. "Whoops." Some of the peas rolled off the side of the table onto the floor.

"When they bounce like that they're overdone," I said, to change the subject. I had been wondering when I would have to go back to lessons again and hoping never.

"I had no more than she," said Aunt, "and found that I had too much."

"What, Aunt," said Henny and we all looked at her as if for the first time.

Aunt never mentioned her girlhood or volunteered, ever, any data on her past. "It is unbecoming," she said.

"Christ, I don't mean to send her to *college*," said Henny, "how right you are!"

"There is more to it than that," said Aunt with what seemed deliberate obscurity and touched the little bell for the maid. Aunt's use of this little bell was clever and it often saved her from the more violent exit she also practised when chagrined beyond her powers or painfully embarrassed by some of Henny's salacious buffoonery.

"Tell us," urged Leda when things had been passed and the maid gone.

It was as if we were going to hear of Aunt's intimate association with a faun or the postman; my imagination began to project itself, perhaps the giddy Sun Beau had attempted her.

"It isn't practicable," she said as if that were final, and just as if it was we all dropped it, when Aunt volunteered with unusual emotion, "I would be happily married today but for my tongue!"

I felt terribly embarrassed by her stepping out of character like this as if she, of all people, had lifted her skirts up over her head.

"I was wittier than he, I frightened him," and she touched the bell. "We will have coffee in the living room," she said to Anna.

Even Henny didn't tease Aunt. We all recognize a tragedy when we see one, even a small one, and Aunt had said

something profound besides, something almost basic about the sexes. And so she had indeed, if you wanted to think about it, raised her skirts. Hadn't she regretted her virginity? Didn't she say in a sentence, "If I had my life to live over again I would sleep with him and keep my mouth shut?"

If I am speaking harshly of a delicate matter it is because I am angry that Aunt should know the facts of life better than I do and that those facts are so simple, without poetry. As Henny once said when C. K. Ogden started a fashion for Basic English, "I've always used basic English," he said, "the facts of life can be stated in four-letter words; what's new about it? All the other words in the language were invented to conceal the fact."

And I remember Dominick's saying, "Do you suppose the the Tower of Babel was the result of modesty?"

And Leda had to say, "Oh, shut up, Henny," when he said, "It's getting harder and harder to find out where the toilet is and if a woman will sleep with you."



Dominick and I spent all afternoon outdoors, walking, talking, and playing. Dominick is silent unless we are close, unless his hands are on me.

"I can't think without feeling you," he said, "just like the Peripatetics had to walk. I have to fondle and caress you. I'm like a sperm whale; it gives off from its head."

I looked sideways at him and saw him smiling as he carried this notion along to its metaphorical climax in his imagination. I love him with a sustained physical and mental excitement. Neither of us talks of the future, of a home of our own, or children. Marriage seems remote, even as Fall does in the middle of Spring; we are living along a kind

of lineage but we do not speak of the past either. Once in a while I remember other characters in my life like Brady, the naughty choirboy and Genie, eagerly ruined, unconsciously vilified by that one's restless coming of age, but they are out of focus; I seem to be looking at Dominick with powerful binoculars and what I see holds my attention. I feel an almost constant nervous pleasure as if I were being fed through the veins. We stand, I think, in the midst of the present, an unusual rendezvous, almost unique, that is rarely found by lovers. How fortunate we are. Our pleasure, our happiness, too, is not dependent on the past or counting on the future. I have read that flying over water (or over a wheat field, perhaps) you can see the place the wind is blowing from opposite directions. We are like that spot. We exist like two halves of a mold, the positive and negative in each of us; one, but androgynous. Our love is urgent but like a gull in a storm it moves along within a greater urgency: the big storm, and we are safe, like it.



Nothing much has come of Dr. Pynchon's suggestion that I get an education and so I am spared, it being conceded that I have outgrown Miss Heminway, that limbo of categories, that big wastebasket of old notions and violent self-control, a formal education. But of my own accord I take up my music where I had quit it and Mr. Vanderdonck is going to tutor me in French; what else he will teach me will depend upon elasticity of my principles, I suppose, and the degree of my complacency, and whether Leda can spare him. At least we are not starting out on *Les Trois Mousquetaires*; Henny has a copy of *Les Bestiaires*. And even if we don't get anywhere with the language of the haut monde, of inter-

national politics, menus, The United Nations, and kept women, Leda says a girl only needs to know one word in French anyway and that is "*non!*"

No one, not even Dominick and I, quite realize that my education has been going on for a long time as he and I, like Héloïse and Abelard, defend our theses, in the study, on the pond, in the swamp and in the groves, orchards, and foot-paths and overgrown gardens, feeding on the minds of poets and philosophers almost to excess but saved, Dominick from impotence and me from frigidity by our own burning *motif*.

"*'In grande abbondanza' they let Byron's blood,*" Dominick whispered as he pressed himself against my legs and with a curled-up tongue tickled and caressed my neck just below the ear. "Noel?" And so we examine each other.



"*Do you tell your mother everything!*" I said to Dominick.

"Why, yes," said Dominick looking beyond me as if he were trying to remember something.

I knew that Leda knew because she had said suddenly at dinner, "I think it's time for Noel's *debut*."

"You're crazy!" roared Henny.

"She ought to meet some young people," Leda persisted.

"Look, do you feel all right, honey?" said Mr. Vanderdonck.

"A *debut* is to introduce a young lady to *older* people," said Aunt.

"Well then, we ought to give a party of *some kind*," continued Leda, "so that Noel can meet some nice boys."

Henny upset his wine glass and my heart began to beat very fast. How naïve of her, how stupid! Dominick was watching his mother closely.

"Noel must learn to be *discriminating*," she said.

Henny howled and when there was quiet I shot my only, and rather bent quill: "Did you speak, Aunt?" I said innocently, turning to her.

Henny gave an appreciative growl. "Clever little timber-doodle," he said, "Leda, my pet, the word discrimination from you is a belly laugh."

Dr. Pynchon had not said anything and did not appear to be paying any attention but on the way out of the dining room he shoved up Leda's short sleeve and pinched her arm. "Jealousy isn't becoming to you, Leda; leave the kids alone; how about taking me on, I'm your size."



That night I felt uneasy alone with Dominick as if there were someone else in the room. My anger at Leda was tempered with pity that she should have so given herself away, her little deceit so uproariously kicked out. But an insidious wedge, a kind of foot in the door, the plump bare foot of Leda, spoiled the quality of our feelings, it seemed to me. Dominick's suggestion, couched as it was, after a spell of quiet, of restlessly taking up a book, ruffling the pages and putting it down, made clear his unconscious return to Leda's powerful maternal influence (had he ever been free of it?). "Noel, let's do 'you know what.'"

I waited a few seconds to see if he noticed what, at least how, he had said what he said and then I said bitterly, "'In cook's closet?'"



I feel a vague need of consolation . . .



Dr. Pynchon came in and interrupted my practising. I could see that he was embarrassed and I wondered why. Finally he said, "I, for one, approve of you and Dominick getting married; I don't see any reason for looking over the neighbors."

I didn't say anything, and he said, "You know the difference between a girl, like yourself, Noel . . . and a . . . woman, don't you?"

I had been letting my right hand stray over the piano keys; feeling a tension in his manner, I had not wanted to pay too much attention to the Doctor. I let my hand hover over C . . . G . . . C . . . and then softly let it fall on the notes and stay there; lifting my foot from the pedal, the music went away. I could hear the Doctor breathing; he moved uneasily and stood up.

"You don't want to talk to your old friend?" he said.

A queer ungallant stubbornness began to build up in me.

"You know the difference?" he said.

"No, I don't," I said, and a strong pure feeling of denial made me stand up proudly and add, "because there isn't any, Dr. Pynchon." I did not soften my statement by any compromising bend of the head or feminine flirtatious withdrawal or qualification. For a split second I was so pure, so good, so right that I imagine I put Dr. Pynchon in the wrong somehow. At any rate I convinced him, if not myself, of *something*, and he knew there was no appeal, or perhaps he said to himself, "What's the use."

"Goodnight, child," he said.



I have not felt like writing in here. The Summer speeds along as if it were rolling down a smooth hill and I am

happy. I feel balanced and sustained as if the elements exerted exactly equal pressures, and through no effort of my own I am supported. Nothing is said about Dominick and me, we are left to ourselves as we used to be like two children, two little neighbors, and I have become almost careless as the days succeed each other like hoops; I mean there is a lack of watchfulness in me. I am inattentive. Dr. Pynchon comes every Sunday; Aunt brings back Sun Beau covered with foam and carefully washes him off her, spraying herself with lavender water and softening her hands with glycerine and rose; Henny and Leda make love in the open, and the dogs lie in the shade snapping at invisible insects. Sometimes Leda looks at Dominick and me when we come in and laughs but any significance is dissipated by a kind of lack of suspicion in me. Perhaps I have a bad case of euphoria. I feel almost stupid.



Our engagement is as taken for granted as I took Dominick's proposal and he my silent acceptance. No special kiss sealed any excessive promise and no trousseau is being prepared for me, no plans laid. Nothing at all seems to be expected of me. But we must nevertheless fit into a traditional design because last night Dominick made his confessions to me as part of a pattern, it seemed to me afterwards. And yet Dominick knows nothing of convention; it must have been something deeper than that. What new feeling has he for me that he must purify himself by confession and look at me afterwards questioningly, "and you, Noel?" But in my present state of happiness it does not matter why he did it; I scarcely have the curiosity to ask, "Perhaps there are things that have no reasons?" And the content of his

spontaneous disclosures did not touch me. Dominick's behavior, it seems to me, can be no wickeder than his thoughts and he thinks with the clarity of an angel.

"I don't remember anything about it," he began, which was the truth. It was plain that it came back to him only as he spoke of it but he was perfectly prompted; he seemed to listen intently for his cue. "Do you remember those workmen who came and dug the well?"

"No, I don't."

"They built a shack, remember?"

"No."

Dominick looked a little discouraged. "How can I tell it if you don't remember it?" he said.

"But I really don't," I said.

"You can't even describe the tall one?" he said.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Dominick."

"Haven't you any insight?" he said, and then it began coming to him as I observed above. He told a queer story of seduction and he seemed quite interested in it, more than I was; it was as if he were telling it to himself for the first time and perhaps he was. Perhaps the meaning or the sequence had just come to him as a dream develops and takes shape after you wake up. As a child the adventure may have had no meaning to him, no sequence. Only his feelings were played upon, maybe it was just a color scheme, a taste in his mouth, weather, anger and tears, all jumbled up with nothing to guide him but the days of the week.

"It was on Tuesdays and Sundays," he said. "When they left they gave me a present, a watch as big as Pop's and a chain; it weighed me down, I hid it."

"Why?" I said, not caring.

"I can't imagine why," said Dominick. "except that it was ugly."

I'm sure I don't know why he should have hidden it either; his remarkable parents would not have punished him for a mere slip of the sexes.

It was then that Dominick said, "And you, Noel?"

"Can't you remember?" I teased him.

It was hot and he had unbuttoned my blouse to my waist. He softly and rhythmically stroked both my breasts with the fingertips of each hand and watched the pink nipples stir. Then he spread out his fingers and touched them scarcely at all with the center of his cool palms. All my feeling, even my thoughts, went straight into them, concentrated in their very tips, making them so sensitive that I withdrew.

"They're good ones," Dominick whispered.

For one second I saw the pale Swede reflected in his hazel eyes. But being a woman I was not as candid as he and did not tell; but neither did I feel dishonest as I tossed the subject back to him.

"Paris?" I said.

"My sin was the sin punishable only in a monastery," he said.

On our way home we saw some tall flat-topped mushrooms in the shade under some young pines as white as if the light penetrated there.

"What a queer place for those to be growing," I said, naming the edible mushrooms I so often picked off the lawns.

"They aren't mushrooms," Dominick said, "it is the *Amanita Virosa* (Destroying Angel)."

I thought of Leda and heard her calling, "Dominick! . . . Noel!"

"Coming, Mater!"

My anger is so slight that it scarcely warms my blood
Dear Dominick.



Paul! And how could I have expected that that lovely weightless feeling as if I were a colored ping-pong ball supported by a stream of fountain water would last! As I try to assemble my thoughts in order to tell of Dr. Paul's unexpected arrival, now that he is gone, I hear in my inner ear Aunt's thin voice, "He is obviously a Jew," and Dominick's pretty remark, "Hebrew is the native tongue of Paradise," and, "Bravo" from Henny.

Leda, in high spirits, held Paul's attention all through dinner, and color along the top of his cheekbones like rouge told me what he was thinking and how bad for him it was. Now that he is gone she loses no opportunity to implicate me in a past love affair; by inference accuses me of sleeping with him.

"I could myself!" she says.

"I'll spank your bottom," laughs Henny.

"Did you sleep with him?" Dominick asked me curiously, his eyes shining.

"I despise him!"

Paul was sitting in the living room the day before yesterday when Dominick and I came in. He stood up and the sunlight streamed through the high windows on his blond head. I was startled and then distressed as if I were dreaming of lying naked with an acquaintance.

"Noel . . ." He stared at me as if no one else were present and I heard Dominick leave. "Will you let me stay an hour?"

For fifteen minutes I listened as Paul, in answer to questions put by me, brought me up to date on my friends to whom, I suppose, I am dead; or well, an outsider, one of those out *There*. My heart beat fast as I recalled the atmospheric tension of the desert, the cyclopean instruments of lost giants erect in profusion, the occult little bird life stirring in tubular cacti like the beginnings of longing in the loins, the colorless gopher group-seizures, the thrill of death and desire, the immodest symptoms of the dying, the passionate and violent by-play of the dispossessed; and I felt as if I had had an aphrodisiac. I heard him say that Mrs. Tibbitts had tuberculosis but was so proud that they all felt less badly than they might, especially as the staff was at fault ("too much direct sunlight; she developed a lesion at seventy-nine.") Virus X is cured; she *carries* her crutch now, "lovingly, under her arm." Cleveland society was shocked by the "normal" woman's divorce a month ago in which she accused her husband of unmentionable fads and and married John Hendricks that night; and Kelly ("Christ, he misses you") is still planning imaginary trips to New York for the weekend inviting the nurses to go with him ("now that you are gone"). He gets progressively worse (Oh my sweet Kelly!)

When he stopped, "Aziere?" I asked.

Dr. Paul lit a cigarette. "Oh she's fine," he said, "gone home."

And I knew she was dead. I saw her in her coffin, the skin of her cheeks as white and shining as the expensive satin lining.

Suddenly Paul stood up and put out his cigarette. I stood up, too, I don't know why. He put his thin taut arms around my shoulders and looked deep into my eyes, way

into the back of my head, it seemed, his blue eyes vibrating like the desert sky at noon. A queer thrill went through me but I found I didn't like it; I tried to remember something but couldn't, again I felt as if I were being made love to by one of the neighbors, one of my Grandfather's friends, some one I had seen in a crowd.

"Stop it, Paul."

Could it *be* Paul? The gentle, suspicious, conscientious Paul who had said to me in the middle of my sudden passion for him, "It is impossible, I am your detector." (how I had wanted to strike him!) and, "I am a Jew"? But a queer smile curved his lips upward like a mannequin in a puppet show, his thin nostrils moved like a trout's gills or like Sun Beau's when there wasn't enough oxygen in the whole world for his passion; he looked quite beautiful and I watched his elegant profile, fine and tender, as if it were a medallion fresh from the mint. I felt nothing other than this pleasant, mild appreciation of his delicate beauty. As I did not try to get away (I felt as if some one were telling me about it), his lean thighs attempted to embrace mine, I stood so passive, but even then I felt as if I were looking on, and I thought, "What's happened to Paul?"

His head still turned aside, the smile increasing, his eyes closed (but the lids are as blue), he gave an impatient shove at one of my knees with the side of his own, opening my legs, and really began.

I came to as if I had been slapped ("This is me!") I am as strong as he and I easily undid him; that is the only way I can describe my extrication. I unwrapped him as if I were undoing a package and I looked him straight in the eyes which was difficult (he has two and each is a dominating cerulean sphere): they were almost black, the pupils dilating

as they used to at the sanitarium when I smelled ether, and his lips were drawn back showing teeth as white as skimmed milk and with bevelled edges. "What a beautiful Jew!" I thought, for the first time identifying him with his race. But this descriptive passage takes too long to express my immediate feelings. A fine white anger as if I were a bitch in heat took hold of me and I snapped my teeth and snarled.

"What the Hell do you think you're doing!" I said.

"You love me."

"I do *not*."

"Come sit down," he said, "I want to tell you; it's wonderful."

I began to feel for him. This quiet, sad Paul, so easily hurt, unable or unwilling to express himself in the past, talked for two hours about himself, ending with a kind of exaltation, ". . . and so you see I love you; I can say it, I am free. Ah, you are my darling, my love, I may call you sweetheart."

"Oh, no you can't, you son of a bitch!"

* * *

All through his discursive and desultory saga, entitled, "Me," a name, "Fritzel," was interwoven and at the mention of this Fritzel his pupils expanded, a look of confidence, an expression of bland security, came over him exactly as over the housewife introducing, "my husband." Except that it was addressed to me I had no place in the story of Paul. Oddly enough he thought I thought I had but I didn't have to be too astute as I listened to see that he was using me in some way, that I as a person did not exist for him, and that the monologue was monomaniac, the only exception: Fritzel.

"I was frantic . . . It was very hard on me . . . I suffered . . . I couldn't stand it . . . I was in a mess . . ." And as he described himself like this I felt that he meant: ". . . but see how wonderful I am now!"

While I watched in amazement this unpleasant metamorphosis taking place in front of me, as if a cat were having kittens and eating the afterbirths (it may all seem very natural and maternal to the cat but I felt as if the thick dry finger of my old nurse was being pushed into the back of my throat to make me throw up), I saw the beautiful Dr. Paul, whose only fault had been a diffidence, an uncertainty (that, it is true, had made me feel responsible), rubbed out as if with an eraser and in his place appear a man foolishly aggressive, over-confident and completely lacking in that nervous tension which makes each of us unique. Without that equalization of different pressures that makes no two of us alike, Paul, I can only describe it as, sprawled. Those special conflicts that had held him together and upright, and that had attracted me to him in the beginning, had melted away as if he had been sewed together with absorbable gut and he began to repel me; I was revolted as if he were nameless, without identity, two men in a horse; it seemed to me as if a tent had collapsed over a lot of miscellaneous objects, empty chairs. He seemed without precision, non-cohesive, disintegrated, and he said, in effect, "I am cured!"

Although in his monody, he repeatedly used the word "I," he had no I-ness. It was Me-ness. Only the special privilege of uniqueness entitles one to say I. It was not hard for me to guess at the reason for Paul's becoming, as it were, in-valid. And now he comes to me and says, "I love you; I may call you sweetheart." Whereas before, his principles,

part of his manhood, had forbidden him to trespass on my love and he could not say, "I love you," although, as he tells me now, he did, quite desperately, enhancing his denial, now he is out of bounds and as "Me," objectifying himself, he may do as he Goddamn pleases; he has become a self, the I has retreated. And all this, the doubtful significance, of Treatment with a capital T, the physician responsible for this everlasting convalescence: Fritzel, I take it. Fritzel changing himself into a woman; Fritzel, deliberately unprincipled, said, "Lie down," and attacked him. Now they are incestuously married, the doctor disguised as the mother, until, which Paul in his inattentive naïveté does not anticipate, the divorce, when Paul with a new but absolutely guaranteed aggression, lacking in respect for his superiors, with no fear of the elements and feeling no pity for anyone, *survival* his motto.

"Back to the slime, Ape Man," I think. I loved you and you turned me down and I still loved you; now you come and say, "I love you," as part of your cure! "Tell her," Fritzel, his sweetheart, pro tem, had said to him and he had obeyed. See how much better he is feeling! "Oh, no, you can't, you son of a bitch!"

Did he hear me? Or was he hurt by my anger? No and not at all. He stayed on through dinner and left, but not before describing to me with great enthusiasm his discovery of a cure for baldness. "See - it works," he seemed to say. "A monopolist," I thought, "You Pygmy!" And he added on the porch while the taxi waited, "I wouldn't be surprised if I got married." Christ on a mountain! But first he must get his divorce from Fritzel.

* * *

Dominick never asked me anything about Dr. Paul although he had left me alone with him for over two hours. That was a week ago and the last, of the adrenalin, I think, that Paul's behavior had generated in me, is dissipated. My expressed anger so like that I had felt and expressed at the sanitarium has strained the sediment left by Leda, too, out of my blood, and my collision with Paul seems like a fable embroidered on a pillow.



As I reread the last entry I am reminded of Herbie, the Hereford, and Dominick's enthusiastic experiments; and how he, the Hereford, had jumped a six foot fence and then, good tempered again, had allowed himself to be taken; how, having made an instinctive decision, temporarily gaining his freedom, he had returned willingly (and rationally) to servitude and good care, food and drink, the future, such as it is, assured.



Thais, the Angus (steer), has brought us all together out of plain human sympathy for the mute, the dumb. Although he has been shipped from nowhere to nowhere he nevertheless has "shipping fever," brought on, the Vet thinks, by a thoughtless swim in the pond when overheated; I remember seeing him, Thais (I named him Thais because it suited him, without reference to his operation), standing happily in the cool water up to his belly, smiling; his jet black reflection motionless; looking like Tutankhamen's aunt.

"He will die if he does not eat," the Vet had said and he shows no disposition to eat. Dominick and I have fed him against his will (but his will is weak, except for death),

eggs, whiskey and cream; a dozen eggs in a quart of cream and two jiggers of Mr. Vanderdonck's best Scotch, willingly donated. I hold poor Thaïs around the neck with one arm and lift his head; Dominick inserts the neck of the bottle (Thaïs' nose is running and there is a thick mucus dripping from his tongue as well) and pours the mixture in. Then the Vet with a sort of child's pop-gun about two feet long "shoots" thirty sulphur pills the size of half-inch thick nickels down his throat. I kiss him on his poll (Angus are hornless), on his hard black forehead; and sneeze from the bits of straw and dust.

"Thaïs, beautiful, don't die," I say.

"Es ist Jahrzeit" (anniversary of death in Yiddish), says Dominick.

Thaïs' translucent eyes no longer reflect anything at all; his movements are without impetus; from habit he sniffs audibly the short sweet grass, raising the grasshoppers who leap and spin, but he does not eat. Sometimes he moves his jaws as if he remembered. Saliva pours from the sides of his mouth. Raising his beautiful Egyptian profile, giving slowly at the knees, Thaïs makes one low moaning protest to mid-heaven and then gently, neatly folding and buckling his legs, collapses. The beautiful Nubian is dead. Russe growls around the carcass.

"Russe!"

And as Dominick and I go sadly back to the house, Russe heartlessly, it seems to me, bounds on ahead, wagging his tail, barking and teasing, but perhaps he thinks everything is for the best.



I find the death of Thaïs making me sad and so I have placed him in the sky in the exact zenith, that mid-heaven

he complained to; I have given him a nice place in the precession of the equinoxes; I have put him along the elliptic between the Lion and the Virgin (Leo and Virgo) because it seems to me that that is appropriate: Thaïs, lion-hearted and pure. And these (Leo and Virgo) are Summer signs. I imagine as I look straight up that I see him brilliantly outlined, one-dimensional, in fiery stars, the newest member of a distinguished fraternity, the Zodiac. Now I get a kind of consolation from the constellation, "Thaïs," as it were.



It is not because I have been busy that I have not written here, nor have I been ill. I seem to be waiting as if I had got some place ahead of time and there was nothing to do but wait seeing as I cannot go back. As I have said, no preparations, at least none visible to the naked eye are being made for my marriage. You would hardly know that Dominick and I will soon be off. Mr. Vanderdonck has a camp in Oregon that he has given us, really given us, where the Douglas firs are eighteen feet around and are spoken of as timber and you catch steelhead trout.

"Nice and lonely," he said, winking at me.

"She can be lonely anywhere," said Dr. Pynchon, "it's a talent some people have."

It is so warm Dominick and I sit out nearly all night.

"Look, Dominick, how early Thaïs sets, soon Sagittarius will lie along the horizon."



Sagittarius lies along the horizon.



I remember how I was convinced I had died when the staff told me to pack up and go home and again I am packing.



Over the glasses raised at dinner to Dominick and me I saw Leda's big hot eyes laughing at me. She gave a little fillip to the glass, a private gesture to her toast. It was as if she said, "To 'you know what.' " I felt my cheeks flush but I don't know if it was anger, or shame at the sorority she suggested. Tomorrow.



Dominick has got off the train early to walk as we stay here an hour. My darling Dominick; I watched him through my lowered lids as he dressed. He did not seem to be aware of my presence until the very last minute; almost out the door, he stepped back in and I closed my eyes tight. Dominick looked down at me a long time and I felt his eyes trace the outline of my body, returning to my face. The happiness of privately enjoying the penetrating and loving looks of your darling is the sweetest of all aphrodisiacs.

Dominick bent down and whispered in my ear, "I'm sorry, Noel."

I didn't answer as I am not expected to have heard. The events of the evening, last night, come back to me but not in chronological order and I make no attempt to arrange them. Again I felt that this was transmigration, that I was nowhere.

"Dominick wait," I said, as under our bodies, the train raced crazily along, "we are not here, this isn't real."

"Noel? Noel? Noel?" I heard his sweet voice out of the past as if the train were leaving it behind,

as if I were really going away this time, the quality manly now, grown up, but with the same inflection. "Noel? . . . Noel?" . . .

I slept in Dominick's arms, warm and dark, a dozen times last night hoping each time to wake up sooner so that I could do it again.

"Wake me up, Dominick, so I can go to sleep."

We are analogous, twins, the Gemini. Dominick, who has loved me ever since I can remember, who undressed me when I was six and taught me all he knew not much later, did not think, I felt, that the night was long enough.

"If only we were Somewhere; why aren't we?" I murmured.

Dominick at last is near sleep and I too feel a swooning diminution as if I were disappearing way ahead of myself. I am a mere dot when I feel Dominick at my side again. It is the only part of him, alive; he is asleep.

"Leda!" His clear sweet voice sung out of his deep sleep like a bell. . . . "Leda!" he repeated, but this time he was waking and his voice sounded strangled, terrified; he struggled. I could not save him; he woke; saw me in his arms, knew what he had done, and as I lay beside him I prayed, "Dear God in Heaven. Dear God in Heaven," and the hot tears stung my eyelids. "Dear God in Heaven."

Dominick . . .